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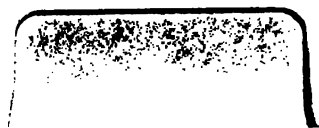
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# A DAGGIAN *of the* ALLEGHANIES

MARAH ELLIS RYAN

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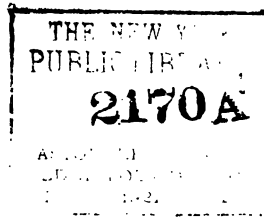
# A PAGAN OF THE ALLEGHANIES

BY  
MARAH ELLIS RYAN

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TOLD IN THE HILLS,  
THE BONDWOMAN, ETC.



GROSSET & DUNLAP  
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK



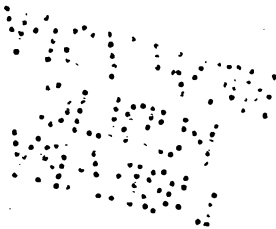
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**A Pagan.**



TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
TWO FRIENDS,

WHO WROTE:

*"The voice of the mountain! Nor what men call learning,  
nor culture, . . . are needed to know its meaning. Often  
it speaks loudest to unlettered man. . . . Solitude, the vul-  
gar's dread, becomes his inspiration.*

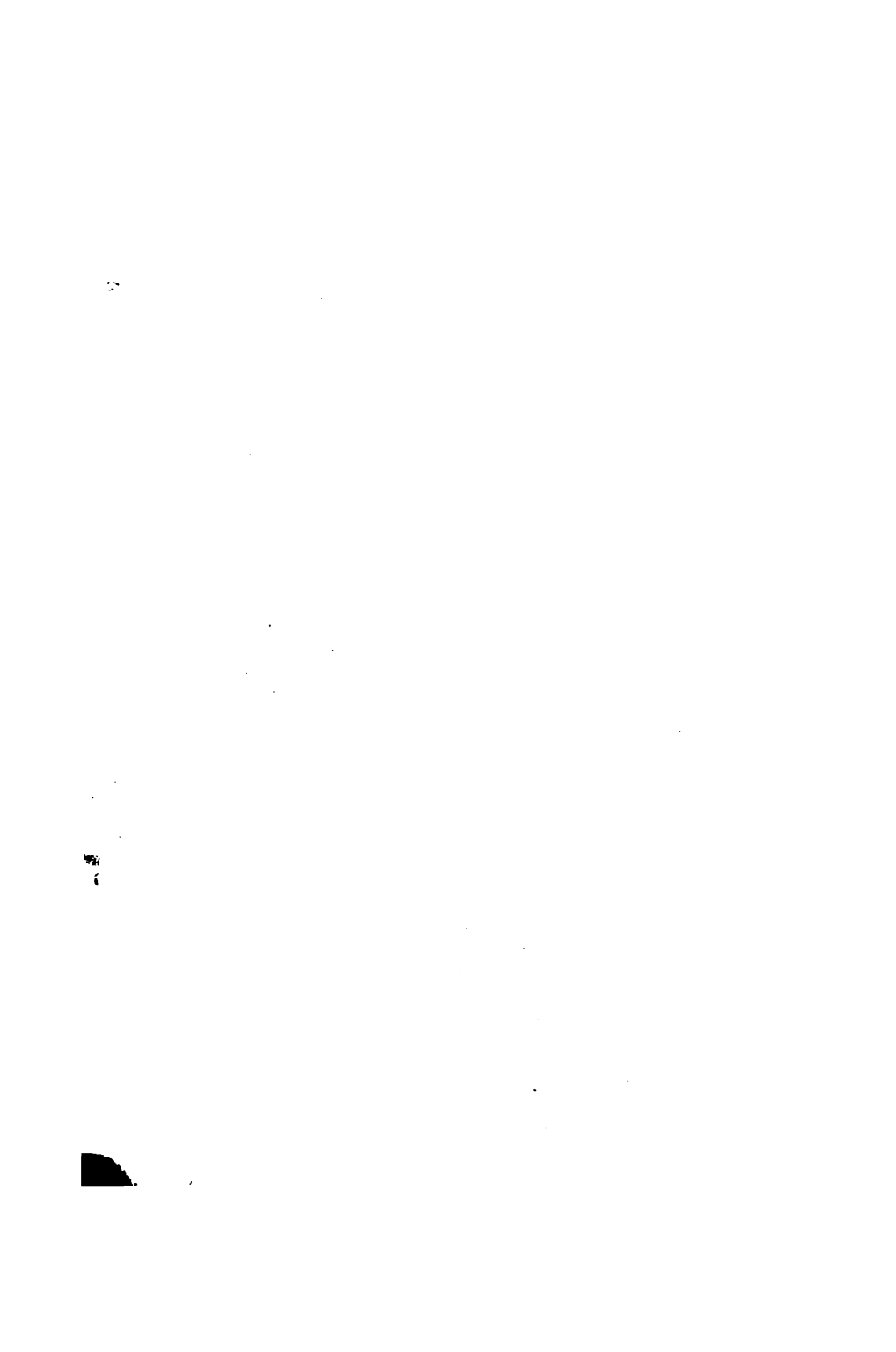
*. . . "Here man fears God,  
At once his littleness and greatness feels—  
Little, that he's an atom of the infinite mystery;  
Great, that he's a part of Infinite Divinity."*

PRENTICE MULFORD,  
*In "Voice of the Mountain."*

*"All the qualities we now possess result from our use of  
ancient opportunities. We are indeed the 'heirs of all the  
ages.' Body is the true Lethe, souls plunged into it forget so  
much."*

EDWARD DWIGHT WALKER,  
*In "A Study of Forgotten Truth."*





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# A PAGAN OF THE ALLEGHANIES.

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## CHAPTER I.

### IN THE HUNTING-GROUNDS OF THE IROQUOIS.

Along the walls of the Alleghanies that stand to the west had crept winds of the south with the kisses of spring in them. Faintest of tender greens and uncertain reds of the new leaves were creeping out along that part of the mountain that rests in little broken waves, as the gown of a woman lies in folds about the feet ere the beginning of those long lines of grace that reach upward to curve of throat or hooded head.

Only to the feet had crept this youngest lover of the seasons—so young in days, but so wise in the lore of winning. Up to those hooded heights he dare not leap, they had been so lately dashed by autumn's tears that weaken, beaten and ravished by the cruel passions of winter, and stripped bare with the life-blood of the forest driven in terror to the heart.

Standing so, facing ever the sunset and the past—a monument of the desolate—it was a wise, far-seeing wooer, who began with tender caresses of sympathy, who covered the bare feet and the cold limbs until they thrilled under the warm greens and gave back whispers that drew him to the summit, which, once gained, he mounted in gay triumph, and rolling aloft his standard of victory—the pink flush of the laurel—he blew backward a careless kiss of farewell, with

no care for the well-faring, and leaving his conquest for the hot kisses of the summer sun, turned to the north, where yet stood others in fetters of ice for which he alone carried the key.

Why is spring ever given the personality of woman, when the boy Cupid has time out of mind ruled love? They are the same always, not to be separated. With love, is not spring ever in the heart? And if a doubt remains of the sex, only watch the tender kissing open of the buds that are first and sweetest; and with the first thrill of the blood that brings blushes this epicure of love tires like any other masculine thing, and never a backward glance of regret toward the forsaken bosom of the forest—never that. For always with spring is the sense triumphant that all the hot passion of summer days will never still in any breast the longings for the tender glimmer of dews that followed the frosts, and that heart-gladdening music of the birds before the nests were built. But to the victor what matter those memories? It is the winning, not the wearing, that is sweetest there. And how can one see a goddess in all that? Surely it is a young god, not a chubby blind child, but a youth with the thrills of compelling life in his veins, and the caressing mouth that trembles, and the eyes that plead, and that elusive smile that is not quite mockery, and yet—

You see it is not safe to dare even write or speak of him, he bewitches one so, and comes uncalled for into the pages that were to hold only a chronicle of the highlands of those Laurel Hills—for the thick green of the immortals crowns those heights looming up changelessly above the western level lands and the settlements, and its name has clung to the mountains as its roots have clung, until the Hills of the Laurels are those to the west; and from them one can see on either side the course of those two turbulent, passionate rivers of Indian naming that cut their way through the

highlands, and give at their meeting a harbor in the hills that is unrivaled.

There must have been much deemed unrivaled or to be desired along this barrier that has been fought for by several nations and many factions, and is yet so untamed and untamable; for the forests have still the freeness of the wilderness in them, as wild, if not so vast, as when the Ligonier Valley was the hunting-ground of the Indian confederacy; as wild as when Nemacolin, the Delaware, pushed through its jungles, leaving the trail for the English soldiers, the trail that for a century was called Nemacolin's Path; the one over which the man Washington rode to his first defeat—and his last. It was over this debatable range that he fought for the cross of St. George, and the enemy's standard bore the Bourbon lilies.

From a nook of that western wall he fired the first gun of a war that erased New France from the New World. And the people walk over the soil of ambush and battle, and look down on the serenity of the settlements, and care nothing for the red cross that once stood there—a shield for the arms of an octopus; and scarcely notice that the nodding blue of the emblem of France persistently grows in nooks where the waters creep.

Yes, much history has been written by tomahawk and sword, in despair and exultation, here in the wild corner of Penn's province, that Half-King, the Iroquois, debated Penn's right to; the untamable corner that long ago the Old Dominion coveted and intrigued for; the wild dells where the clanking chains of runaway slaves have broken through the rustle of leaves—stray human things willing to share the life of bear and deer for the thing that so few people who possess ever value—the trifle of freedom. All those phases of life have been throbbled through on the bosom of the Ligonier and the battlements of the Laurels; but that

is of the past. Corn grows in patches through the hunting-grounds; the plow turns up arrow-heads in the new soil, and the oxen tread them under in the next furrow; the interlopers haul their lumber and grain along the shadowy old roads through the timber-land, with never a thought of the moccasined feet that trod them first—no one cares; no one remembers.

And instead of Iroquois councils under the lodge of Tanacharison, the Half-King, there may be seen any Saturday at "The Roads" a sprinkling of voters gathered from the farms or the log-camps, and there may be heard desultory dickerings over the merits of the different steeds of different grades hitched to the posts by the store porch. And another familiar topic of conversation is the wandering hog and his several and distinct marks, for this self-supporting rooter, furnishing the maximum of stock wealth in the mountains, is not to be despised; and the question after the chestnuts and acorns fall is: Four and a half cents on the hoof in the market-places, or that possible extra half-cent that gives as result the desired nickel.

The women come also to "The Roads," with their splint-baskets filled with eggs, or pats of butter in cabbage-leaves, often from the near farms; and these, voluble, well acquainted, and self-assured, are looked on as quite worldly, because of their proximity to this metropolis of the hills. And then there are others more seldom seen, the women folk from the "wooden" country in the interior; quieter in speech, and not so ready with good-natured badinage over their trade for small groceries. From their great shadowy, curtained bonnets eyes look out shyly, yet curiously, on those strange store-room assemblages. At times it is hard to tell whether the face curtained so jealously from scrutiny is old or young; but the hands are almost always brown and hard from the weather, the ax, and the plow, and the

feet move heavily, unnaturally, under the imprisoning weight of shoes. But their voices! The slow provincial speech in mellow monotone sounds on the ear as if the whispers of native forests had mingled long ago with baby-lips, and left with the tones of the mountain-born a cadence akin to melody; but it is a music as common to the wood as the matinees and vespers of the robin, and as little noted. The clearing of patches for buckwheat and the fights with weeds in the corn-field leave little space for the gleams of poetry about them. And so moves life over the old hunting-grounds of the Six Nations—those Indian autocrats.

And one evening of early spring, one of the spring days that grow misty as with the tenderness of Indian summer, the dignitaries of the store porch were struck into contemplative silence as the sound of hoof-beats on the road was followed by the sight of two equestrians riding from one of the back roads into the broad national one called the Pike. The new-comers were a man and woman, both young, both looking rather "tailor-made" beside the natives of "The Roads."

"They are stationed there like guardian angels," said the girl in an undertone as her companion dismounted; "and what eyes they have! Don't be long in there about the mail. I am not easily abashed, but to be a target for all that scrutiny is rather appalling."

She did not look abashed, however, as her very level eyes took in the unstudied grouping about the door in one leisurely, comprehensive glance, after which she turned her attention back over the way they had come, where great billows of green rise in shattered irregularity across the rugged Ligonier Valley.

"Did you notice that loose shoe?" she asked, pointing to his mare's foot as he reappeared; "that's what made her



stumble down there in the hollow. It's a pity to ride her home like that."

"So it is," he agreed, examining its hoof; while two or three of the guardian angels flopped down from their perches on the railings and fluttered nearer, with the dubious mingling of unconcern and curiosity on their faces.

"Any blacksmith around here?" he asked, looking up at their approach.

"Naw, sir, tha' ain't," returned a stripling with a snuff-stick in his cheek.

"None nearer than Uniontown?" asked the girl, turning to an older man who was braced complacently against a hitching-post.

"No, ma'am, not much; there's one down foot of the mountain, this side o' town, 'an then tha' is a man back in the timber shoes stock if he's a mind to; but strangers couldn't find the way, likely."

"Back in the timber?" repeated the stranger impatiently; "small use he is to the community back there. I should think right at the cross-roads is the place where one is needed; a good one ought to make money here. Why don't he try it?"

A smile of grim sympathy lit up two or three of the faces, and then the man at the post remarked:

"It's been talked over some, an' the decision o' the judges in the case has decided that it's because he's too *cussed*." The speaker turned his eyes porchward as if for commendation, and evidently thought he got it, though all was silence. "Yes, sir—yes, ma'am, they's some people so plum contrary tha' won't do theyselves a good turn because tha'r too scared lest tha' might be doing one for some other man; an' that's about the measure o' Dick Le Fevre."

"Well, I wish for the time being that he was here, what-

ever his disposition," remarked the horseman, looking gloomily at the hobbled hoof. "If I can't get it on I'd be satisfied to get it off."

"Here comes a man who will fix it," said the store-keeper and post-master, as from the door he spied a figure crossing a mountain meadow toward them.

"Yep," agreed the loquacious he of the post, "he'll either tinker the shoe or argy scripture, whichever you will;" and then he tapped his bony temple significantly. "Not dangerous, though," was the hasty assurance as the girl turned quickly around; "oh no, ma'am, not a bit; only just queer, that's all."

The man who was "queer" crossed the fence carrying an ax on his shoulder—a man of perhaps thirty, a slow-moving, bearded specimen of a mountaineer, with shoulders so broad that they gave him a squatty appearance as he came toward them with his head bent.

"Ho, Lennard! called the man of the store, "here's someone wants your help a bit."

He raised his head then, and no longer looked squat, and coming close to them his size made the other men look small. His slow eyes of a greenish gray moved over the group, looked intently into the eyes of the girl, who drew back a little, and then with equal earnestness perused the face of the stranger.

"You, I reckon?" he said, slowly; "what might it be?"

The loose shoe was shown him, at which he looked without comment, and then leaning his ax against the porch he disappeared around the corner, and they heard him opening and closing the barn-door.

"It's all right," nodded the storekeeper. "He has gone to the tool-chest for something to work with."

"What an uncomfortable character to have around," said the girl; "his eyes make me nervous. Does he live here?"

"God bless you—no, ma'am," was the gratuitous benediction of Mr. Speaker of the occasion. "Lennard don't live in no man's cabin but his own, and it's quite a ways back from 'The Roads.' But no one minds him comin' and goin'. He'll take what he needs out o' any man's stable, but he brings it back again."

Then they heard the barn-door close again, and the clink-et-y-clank of metals, and the subject of their discourse loomed up around the corner with some pinchers, a claw-hammer, and a cold-chisel, tools pressed into service for blacksmithing. Without a word, he picked up the foot and tapped and twisted, and loosened and pulled the remaining nails until the shoe dropped into his big hand; and the mare set her foot down gingerly, as if by degrees to get used to the lightness of that one leg.

"I am very, very much obliged to you," said the young man, as the smith picked up the tools and turned away. "But wait a bit, sir. I owe you something for that."

"I allow not," returned the man, not checking in the slightest his walk. "I'd do that much to save any beast from going lame."

"That's him all over," remarked one of the guardian angels; "an' talkin' to him ain't no kind of use. He's got as much contrariness as Le Fevre, only it's a different sort."

The stranger, with his hand in his pocket, looked perplexedly in the direction the man had gone.

"Well, it's a favor, and I'm greatly obliged to him," he said at last.

"That's all right," decided the judge at the post, as if it was himself who had given the service. "You're welcome. Reckon the hoof can make the trip without a shoe all the distance you're goin'. Headin' for the summit, ain't you?"

"Up that way. Good-evening."

And then the halt was ended, the horses turned again into the road, and their riders turned naturally to the discussion of the group they had left.

"All of them looked alike," decided the girl.

"No," protested her companion, "that man the smith looked like no other."

"Oh! he; well, we must make allowance for that one. Yes, he had an individuality in his face, but of a queer sort; and you know they said he is a bit silly."

"Nothing silly about the nice way he took off that shoe."

"No use talking to you," she laughed. "You have a faith in finding unalloyed nuggets of gold among the native specimens here, but you won't; you seem to think that the magnificent character of the country must of course produce the biped man on the same scale of grandeur, and you may find some type which will physically come up to your expectations, but mentally—well, with all their width of views and rare air, I would fancy people stifling here."

The speaker was a pretty girl, with a tinge of habitual disdain about the lips that showed she was aware of the prettiness; a clever girl—just clever enough for no one ever to be quite sure how much Dinah Floyd really knew about anything.

"Oh, I agree that the natural advantages and disadvantages are above par up here," she continued, "and the timber-lands seem endless; but those people—I mean the ones in the wood—what monotonous, sleepy lives they live in the cabins by the corn-fields. I wonder if many of them go melancholy mad?"

"Not any," returned the gentleman, composedly; "they generally have sound minds in sound bodies; and if you ask them what class furnishes the greatest number of lunatics to the county, they will tell you the latest innovation, the idle summer visitor."

"And I am an idle summer visitor, thank you, Mr. March."

"So am I, Mistress Touch-me-not; so are we all."

"Nothing of the sort. Don is a landed proprietor—"

"Of course he comes first on the list," remarked Mr. March.

"A landed proprietor," repeated the young lady, "though moodily at war with his inheritance. Then Aunt Lottie is reproducing the beauties of nature in water-colors, and she is not idle. Papa has been hunting vigorously for the trace of those forts of an extinct race that are supposed to abound here, so he is surely not idle; and you—well, you are such a creature for taking silent notes when other people think you sleeping that your industry is difficult to estimate—anyway, you are not an orthodox summer visitor at all; this is only spring-time, and you are only a transient, halting just long enough on these peaks to look down and laugh at this band of exiles."

"Do you feel so much like an exile?" and his voice was dangerously pitiful.

"Do I? Well, if you were carted to the country before the leaves are out, and just at the season when New York is most delightful—"

"And the spring exhibitions just opened, and a certain gentleman's pictures given a place of honor," added her companion.

Her eyes—brown eyes—glanced brightly at him as she reached forward to flick a deer-fly from her horse's ear.

"Certainly, that makes greater my regret at having a couple of guardians who fancied that just for once it would be delightful and economical to come to the woods and wait for summer. I know I shall have rheumatism, lumbago, and a dozen kindred complaints from the dripping trees, and the clouds that wrap themselves around the mountains like wet blankets—that's what they are to me. I have been

thinking desperately of turning rebel and leaving Papa and Auntie and Don to vegetate alone."

"And go back to see—Tom Saxel's pictures. Is that it, Dinah?"

Dinah laughed. "Auntie has taken you to her heart of hearts and been confidential, has she not? Poor Auntie! her prejudices make her fearful. She and Saxel are always at swords' points. She declares he draws badly, and I know that the sight of her patchy water-colors gives him a nervous chill."

"Hm-m! You seem very well acquainted with the condition of Saxel's nerves," growled her listener, ferociously, but with eyes as quizzical and non-committal as her own.

"Yes, if you want to learn one's strong or weak points, work together in a studio. You know I worked in his last year."

"I ought to; he speaks of it often enough. How is it you are doing no work out here?"

"I don't do landscapes, and haven't seen any types among the natives that aroused my interest."

"You keep too close to the broad highway; get out into the bridle-paths if you want to find originality; these people we stop with try too hard to be copies of the summer tourist. If I remained here I could find material for work; I am sure of it."

The girl shrugged her shoulders in unbelief. "You have been here three days," she said, counting them on her fingers. "I have been here three weeks, and have a conviction that if I stay three years I am not likely to change my opinion. The country is grand, and the people are tame. I have heard of a few murders around about, which the natives tell of in a way that forces me to believe a murder the most romantic thing their lives can conceive. And the worst of it is, Auntie rather likes it—thinks it so

## A PAGAN OF THE ALLEGH-

interesting to hear the stories, and then go and visit the scenes. I never imagined she had such ghoulish propensities. Is it any wonder I turn rebel?"

"Edson should be a rock of refuge," was the only reply to this rather lengthy complaint.

"Don? Yes, he should be, but is not. He has actually grown moody for this past week. I have ridiculed him until I believe he begins to see it is a piece of folly to bury himself here; wish I could do the same thing with my own family."

"And persuade them to desert Edson to his fate, and the wilderness?"

"Certainly," and then his manner of speech and tone made her add, "and why not?"

"Well—pardon me if I am on forbidden ground—but are you not rather a heartless damsel, considering—"

"Considering what?"

"Well, considering that this exiled knight of the green woods is to claim you as his lady some day."

"Um! Is he? How nice of him, or you, to arrange it all without troubling me with the matter. And pray where is the happy consummation of these dreams to take place?"

Her eyes were bright—was it with mischief, or vexation? He did not know. His own were very gray, very steady, very honest eyes.

"Well," he said, slowly, "Miss Lottie told me the accident of your future was that you and Don Edson would be married some of these days, when Don settled down and you stopped flirting. Are you flirting, Dinah?"

She tried to laugh, but looked at him and failed. She took refuge in woman's defense of indignation.

"You have no more right to repeat such senseless questions as to ask such an impertinent question."

having delivered the speech with a self-satisfying amount of displeasure, she touched the horse with the whip, or attempted to do so, but was checked by the hand that coolly caught her own and held her fast.

"*Are* you flirting, Dinah?"

"Nonsense! With whom do you—"

"Oh, not with me, of course," he agreed, amiably; "only I was afraid you might be with Don."

"Cousin Don should be grateful for your interest," she remarked, dryly.

"*Cousin* Don?"

"Well, yes. Haven't you heard him call Papa uncle, and Auntie aunt?"

"I believe I have," he agreed; "but when I asked about the relationship it dwindled down to a life-long friendship between Don's Uncle Edson and your father."

"Well, I'm sure I would rather choose my own relations than have them thrust upon me in the unsatisfactory usual way."

"Naturally," he agreed. "I think myself it would be an improvement, especially since it includes Don Edson in your list of cousins. I could imagine another position in which he would be much more formidable."

"To whom?"

"To those unlucky individuals whom you flirt with, and say you don't."

"It is a wonder to me how you ever have any time to think of your own affairs," remarked the girl, tartly, "since so much of it is taken up with your consideration for other people."

"Oh!" he rejoined, lightly, "in many cases I don't pretend to look after my own affairs—too much exertion. When I find they are getting too much for me, I turn coward and run away; and I'm going to-morrow."



"Really?"

"Really."

"And what of—of the material for romance that ~~you~~ thought floated about these peaks, and that you were ~~to~~ capture by your pen. Is it all to be unwritten?"

She looked the picture of unconcern, or would have had it not been for the flush that persisted in creeping up to the fluffy curls—a flush the man must have seen too, for he leaned forward in the saddle and laid his hand on hers.

"Wait until I come back, Dinah," he said, in a tone more earnest than he had used. "I am simply stealing time from myself in order to stop here at all. But at the end of summer, when the fox-hunters come trooping out here, I am coming back, if—if fortune will grant me a bank account this summer, and you remain. Can I?"

"You have stated that you will without asking my leave," she flashed back, with a laugh that was sister to the deepening blush.

"Well, then that is settled," he decided. "I am to come back; and I shall expect you to keep notes for me of all unusual phases of the life you meet in the 'wooden' country."

"Do not bore for anything unusual. Have I not told you how commonplace it all is here?—all but the hills and valleys; and even you could not string a romance from those speechlessly expressive things, for nothing ever happens here."

"Something will in the autumn, Dinah, will it not?"

"What?"

"Why—I will come back."

And at the bit of non-committal egotism they both laughed, as people laugh who understand each other. And then their horses broke into a canter, and they sped down the broad road that is called "National," crossing the low

bridge where the ghost walks, and then up the shadowy sides of the mountain, where the ferns grow in sunless nooks, and where the deer-tongued laurel raises grotesque antlers above the azalias, their mingled bloom giving a fragrant pink to the far-reaching ranges that go away to the north, with its cool skies, and away to the south, where the horizon seems always bathed in mists that hold a charm in their changeful hues—mists ever alluring, ever suggestive of warm moons and the life of lotus-eaters. And over those peaks, from which they have vast views of either the storm-land or dream-land, live the mountain people, surrounded by the usual patches of corn or of buckwheat—the lives that to the worldlings who have come in sight of them seem so uneventful and monotonous that the girl had voiced the sentiments of the majority when she declared them so commonplace that no thing of interest was ever likely to happen there.

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## CHAPTER II.

### COMMENT AT THE CROSS-ROADS.

The group on the store porch, steeped in the content of tobacco and rumination, did not immediately recover its lapsed speech as the pair of strangers passed on down the road, and then:

“A likely bit, that roan she’s a ridin’,” commented one of the judges from the bench of steps.

“That’s young Edson’s,” volunteered another, with an assumption of superior knowledge in his tone; “a new one, just sent here from Kentucky last week.”

“Another one! Well, that young fellow ’ll have enough to

stock the mountain ef he keeps on. Must cost him some for their keepin'."

"He'll wear them all out before he gets through with the work he's cut out for himself," decided the dignitary of the post, who had again betaken himself to his perch on the railings and the careful whittling of a stick. "I hear tell that he's to have trouble back at Dumphey's ef he claims that place as lan'lord. Dumphey says he'll fight."

"Dumphey never paid taxes on the ground," said the storekeeper, joining them again at the door. "This young Edson is in the right in a law sense. The land belongs to the Edsons."

"Then why don't they come an' live on it?" queried a sandy-complexioned individual. "What right's a man to have so much land he don't know where it all lays?—that's what I want to know."

"That's so," conceded a black-and-tan specimen, with a molasses-jug and sack of corn-meal between his knees. "Ad's right; this here gobbling up of this here mountain land in big sections is just like them monopolists does with iron an' wheat an' things—just crowds a poor man to the wall; an' after awhile they'll grab all the land up here, an' then what sort o'show is the people to have that lives here? That's what's the matter!"

"Old Donald Edson is not much of a monopolist," said the storekeeper, "when he has let that land lay there for everybody's use over thirty years now—paid the taxes while other folks cut the pick of the timber off it." There was an uneasy shifting of the molasses-jug and meal-sack at this speech, and the whittling knife was idle a moment. "I see they're all set against this young Don Edson, who has come out to look up their claims; but, gentlemen, I believe he's square. He wouldn't be old Donald's nephew if he wasn't."

"Looks to me, Art Hubbard," said the quavering, high-pitched voice of an old weather-beaten man who smoked on the door-step, "that yer a layin' yerself out as an *ad-vocate* o' the Edsons these days, an' ye'll find work to yer hand ef ye do. I'm a talkin' now!"

Some of the others nodded an appreciation of the patriarch's speech, which tickled the giver of it until he broke into a shrill, tantalizing attempt at a laugh, which ended in broken, maudlin repetitions of the fact that "he was talkin' now."

"All right, Pap," said Mr. Hubbard, easily, as if caring little for contrary opinion; "talk away, and think as you like. The old man has given a dozen families free rent of the land for years; but there's no reason why he must keep on doing it."

There was silence among the "angels" for the space of a minute or so; evidently that view of the question had not been presented to them before, and it was weighty enough to require study and deliberation. Then the black-and-tan man treated himself to a fresh chew of "dog-leg," and said:

"Well, taxes or no taxes, young Edson's a hard case, anyway."

"Shucks!" ventured one of the skeptical.

"I heard tell it, just the same," he insisted. "I did that!"

"Now who told it?" demanded the whittler from his perch. "He ain't none too welcome in these parts, but no one reckons him anything of a tough."

"May be there's hard cases who ain't toughs," decided this nice definer of terms. "Big-bugs, ye know, that are fine gentlemen; they'll gamble an' race, an' beat the d—l for girls an' whisky, but they're all so fine an' so high an' mighty about it that ye never think o' callin' them tough, as ye would a poor man; an' that's jest about the size o' this Mr. Don Edson."

"That's all easy enough to say," remarked Hubbard. "We can hear ducks, too."

"Well, this ain't no duck quackin', Mister Hubbard," said the black-and-tan, pushing a droopy, wide hat to the back of his head. "I got it for facts from the man—his name is Phipps—that old Donald Edson sent out with that batch of horses, before the young fellow come at all. He said the young fellow had been a livin' too high for the old man this winter. They had a sort o' quarrel about some debts o' gamblin' or somethin', an' then they patched up a peace if young Don 'ud come out to the mountains for a year, an' look up their land an' try an' manage it; and from what I heard, the old man's nephew ain't anything of a saint."

The old patriarch on the door-step mumbled delightedly his own knowledge of young blood and its tendencies, and would have drifted into reminiscence had not the store-keeper interrupted him.

"Well, there are some mighty nice people come out here just on Edson's account—that young lady we just saw, and her father, who they say is writing a book about these old Indian forts about here; then there is his sister, an oldish lady; and they all think a heap of young Edson, so he can't be such a very bad one."

"Well, I guess they're sort o' relations, and so hang together," decided the sandy man.

"Folks are troopin' up to the mountain mighty early this year," remarked the man of the molasses-jug, who evidently had a knack of gathering news, for he added: "Say, have any o' you folks heard the latest from the rock ledge?"

"Naw; what's up with them now?"

"Le Fevre's wife has come back to him."

"Who said that?"

It was the man who had taken off the horseshoe who asked the question. He had joined them unnoticed, taking no part in their conversation until now; but his ears had evidently been open all the time, and his eyes assuredly were as they bent their compelling scrutiny on the informant.

"I heard Jim Stone tell it over at Hackett's frolic last night," he answered. "Dick went over into Virginia after her, I guess; anyway, she's back at the house."

"Thought Dick said she shouldn't come back," said the sandy man.

"Naw, 'twasn't Dick," contested the autocrat on the railing; "it was that hell-pet of a granny o' his; leastwise, it was her I heard tell of sayin' of it."

"Well, Dick's just onery an' cussed enough to say it, too—or worse."

"What different sort of a whelp can ye look fer from such a dam?" queried the old man, as he got up stiffly and haltingly from the door-step. "There was bad French blood on his daddy's side, and bad Injun, or the God knows what, on old Moll's side—no one ever did know rightly what she was, an' don't yit; an' what sort of a whelp can ye look for from stock like that? I'm a talkin' now!"

"Say, Bud," asked one of them, "didn't you know nothin' 'bout Le Fevre's woman comin' home?"

"No."

"You an' her was kind o' good friends. I thought may be they'd let ye know."

"No."

"There's the supper-bell, gentlemen," remarked the storekeeper, "and I'm going. Come in, Bud?"

"No."

The men gathered up their baskets and jugs. The sun had dropped almost to the summit of the mountain

unnoticed in the amount of interesting matter they had found to discuss, and soon their long shadows were passing over the yellow dust of the road, and then out along the fences where the new grass was greening the fields. In the house back of the store were heard the sound of voices and some boys laughing, the clatter of dishes, and clink of the poker and metal lids of the stove. Someone chased a dog out of the house, throwing a broom after him to hasten his movements, and adding a shrill accusation concerning his weakness for stealing from an oven.

His dogship looked back furtively, but was too wise to return, and made his way in stately unconcern into the back door of the store-room, knowing well that under one corner of the counter was a nook from which no one dared turn him. But passing the open front door he paused, turned his soft steps over the threshold to a figure that sat on the steps with bowed head leaning on its open hands, and then the fear of broomsticks seemed driven out by some sympathy, and he crept closely and softly under the arms of the man Bud, and looked up into his face with eyes tender as the afterglow tinging the clouds; for the sun had gone down beyond the mountain.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### DINAH AND DON.

"Oh! had I the wings of a dove!" chanted a voice on the heights, and was immediately taken to account by another voice, a masculine one, asking: "In which direction would they take you, Dinah?"

The speakers, the young lady of the roan bit of horse-

flesh, and a man—another man—were throned on a peak that looked high enough for the wily Lucifer to use for his temptation scene. The ends of the earth might not be visible, but a good deal of the other part was, and lay spread out to the west, a green plain, away below the mountain, merging into blue in the distance, and the sunshine of May over it all.

"Which way would you go?" repeated the bantering voice. "Tom Saxel is away over those mountains to the east, and by this time Ned March is across considerable prairie to the west, and I myself am here. In which direction are you going, Dinah?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Don. You're as bad as Aunt Lottie. She never got married herself, and neither will you, but you both seem disposed to make a present of me and a marriage certificate to every man who speaks to me twice. I am tired of being so badly given away."

The man stretched on the grass near her laughed and plucked some purple violets to add to the store in her lap.

"But I don't want to give you away at all," he protested. "Give you away! There is desolation in the thought. What a lonely outcast I should be here without you."

"You have a host of tenants for company, if you want to cultivate them," she said, a little maliciously.

"Yes, and am an alien among them. Poor as I am, this gift of wild land is a white elephant on my hands."

"Poor! Is there any good and sufficient reason why you should be so poverty-stricken after having a generous allowance for years?" asked the young lady with some asperity.

He laughed again; in fact, he had the careless, gracious manner to which laughter is close kindred; then it was becoming, he had such fine teeth.

"Not a reason in the world," he said, easily, "except that



my riches always have such restless wings, and my pockets always have holes through which I lose my pennies."

"Poor child! Well, he shall have one penny for luck;" and she dived her hand into some receptacle among her draperies. "There is a nice big one to start your fortune with in the mountains."

He reached for the penny, but held her fingers as well.

"I need something to bring me new luck," he said, contemplating her hand and wrist very attentively. "I wonder if you know how much, Dinah? Did—did you hear all of this late law of the old man's? and—"

She drew her fingers leisurely from his own as she said:

"Don't you think that term rather irreverent for your uncle? Don, you are degenerating sadly."

"I know it"—but his contrition did not quite chase away his smile; "that is what the governor has decided; and after giving me rope enough to hang myself with for the past ten years, he suddenly gets straight-laced himself and vows that I must do likewise, dear old fellow! He means well, but reformation is hard work."

"Yes, it is," agreed the girl, with the sympathetic sigh of a veteran sinner; and then they both laughed. But the laugh of the man was not a very merry one; gloomy, impatient thought followed it closely.

"If he had only let me foster that old ambition of mine—the music," he said, regretfully, "I might not have had so many sins to reform of. I sold my birthright for the pot-tage of pastime. I was too much of a boy to know that a man's life must have something stronger to do in the world than hunt pleasure; but I know it now. And crazy as I was over music, I did not realize fully, when I was ridiculed and coaxed into giving it up, that it was the only thing in life I was fit for. I know that too, now."

"Is it too late?"

He flung his head up impatiently, and then dropped it forward in his hands. The voice of the girl was kind and was interested, but one must feel something more deep than kindly interest in the voice of another before it is possible to break open for his gaze the vault in which our dreams are locked. Those wraiths of past hopes whose sighs we strive to drown with the sound of our laughter, how they creep close in unguarded moments and show us their fair lost faces! And our hands, assoiled of the world, can no longer touch them, and the glimmer of tears in their shadowy eyes fashions heart-aches against which we rebel and are slow to acknowledge. Ah! those ghosts of the things that were to be!

"Have you gone asleep there, Don? We were speaking of the music. Is it too late for—"

"Yes, much too late; too late to go back, too late to begin anew—too late for everything but regret."

The girl watched him dreamily for a little, and suddenly asked:

"Don, there is something puzzling to me in the bitter dislike the senior has shown to any musical leanings of yours. It is all at variance with his usual indulgence. Auntie became dumb when I spoke to her of it. The taste for it is surely inherited from your mother. Her voice made her a reputation to be proud of, and from her picture she must have been beautiful; and how Donald Senior could have disliked such a lovely creature—"

"I always fancied that it was not dislike at all that kept them apart," he answered. "Perhaps it was liking; and that was worse, I suppose, since she was his brother's wife."

"Oh! but why should he object to a musical career for you?"

"Heaven only knows, I don't. The force of the objec-

tion is all I know, and my own promise to give it up that I was coaxed and ridiculed into. But let's talk of other things, or I'll be blue as indigo."

"Never mind; may be some good luck is awaiting you in these mountains."

"May be;" and he laughed shortly. "You are the only good luck I have found so far, and mighty thankful I have reason to be to you. Oh, yes," he added, with a smile struggling upward over a sigh; "yes, the world lends me more bright gleams than I deserve, no doubt, and you have been one of the brightest."

"You are a humbug, Don," she said, promptly. It is Aunt Lottie you mean to say that of, and you know it. She was the prime mover in our exodus from civilization. You simply took advantage of that benighted creature's fondness for you to inveigle her out here."

"Do you suppose I wanted to come into exile alone?"

"And I am the martyr of your reformation—isn't that what you call this vacation from the world?—and my martyrdom is not even crowned with appreciation. I am simply voted a 'crank,' as martyrs always are by their contemporaries. Ah me!" But her lugubrious sigh awakened no pity.

"Who is the humbug now?" he asked. "I do not believe you will ever be a martyr for anyone. But I have an idea, Dinah, of something you might be."

"Well?"

"A good anchor for a man who needs a cool head and clear eyes beside him; and, Dinah—"

"Yes," she said, rising to her feet, "at the studio they told me I had a very correct eye. The more the pity that I lacked the application of a student."

He arose too, looking down at her, and needing his generous stature to do it, for she was not petite.

"But you are an anchor one would be puzzled to find a chain for," he continued. "You are such an elusive creature; and I—I really wanted to talk seriously to you to-day about—some things."

"Well, we can talk and walk at the same time, can't we? And we must be getting back to the house or miss our tea. This has been a perfect afternoon. I have four varieties of violets to take back as trophies, and being so well satisfied I can listen even to your serious 'somethings;' but when Auntie, or Papa, or even your senior, proposes serious subjects to me they are usually preparing me for a lecture. Are you?"

"Can't you imagine me wanting to say something to you, Dinah, that would be serious? Yet—"

"Certainly," she broke in. "I can always understand that you have a weakness for talking seriously to most girls, haven't you, Don? And the matrons, have not a few of them received your 'serious' consideration as well? Ah, yes," she added, with an impish impulse to be ironical, "seriousness is always becoming to people with sensitive mouths and dreamy eyes; and then it is always so much more effective."

The dreamy eyes, that were darkly indefinite as to color, elongated under a quick frown, as when the sun suddenly strikes one in the face unsheltered, and a flush of red crept up to his forehead.

"How little faith you have in me. Yet I did come out here to forget old follies; yes, old faults. I need to before I can hope for any new luck that is good luck."

There was no anger in his voice, and the girl's eyes looked sorry as he spoke.

"I am ashamed of myself for saying such things to you," she said. "Why don't you retaliate by giving me a lecture, as you used to when I was rude? I could stand

it better than your hurt acceptance of my ugliness. Don't mind anything I said, for I would always have faith in anything you would give your word to—only—I don't understand—”

“No, that is it,” he agreed. “You don't understand—neither did Uncle Don about the music; but never mind, Dinah, that is not your fault—more than likely it is mine. Shall we go now?”

And descending the peak of wide views, they made their way down to an old grass-grown road through the timber, and found little to say to each other on their way back to the high-road.

She had known him so long—always, it seemed to her; and the two young people had for years laughed over and flirted with that scheme of their elders—the idea that Dinah Floyd was to be Dinah Edson when Don settled down and she stopped flirting.

But of late Don had not laughed at the plan as of old. His life had begun to seem to him so much the life of one who garners dead-sea fruit, finding the hands and the lips poisoned, while all the time there was within that bit of divinity that protested. An idea that this keen-eyed, cool-headed girl would understand or would care had prompted him to speak. He had always liked her, and perhaps—and perhaps—

Tired as he was of an erratic life, the freshness of the forest in the sweetest of seasons was not at all the doleful thing to him he had jestingly complained of to the girl. There was so much of novelty in the thought of possessing all that wild land and living for a season in its hills; and Donald Edson had said, “It is all yours if you go there and live one year, showing at the end of it that you have any care for it, or any interest in its development. As you don't take to anything else in the way of business, you may

find your vocation as a landed proprietor. You will hear no Wagnerian orchestration in the Laurel Hills, but the birds sing, I believe. I know the foxes used to bark, and the panthers call, and the bear and deer can't all be cleared out."

Balancing the novelty and the sacrifice of the world, and influenced in no slight degree by the sensationalism of the idea, Don had accepted the offer and the year's isolation. At least the birds would sing. And the birds did sing, and he would sing back to them, trying to establish some brotherhood of feeling with the feathered natives, since the human ones did not take kindly to the new owner, who they thought would likely interfere with the amount of lumber surreptitiously "snaked" out of the old claim that many of them had lived on until they had an ingrained feeling of combativeness against the holders of deeds and such like legal trifles.

"It's natural enough that those people who have lived on the little clearings for forty years care more for them than a man who has never seen them before," he decided, a few evenings after the arrival of his friends, the Floyds; "blest if I like to interfere with their homes or plans of living for a whim that may result in a fiasco. I think I will just drop the interesting question of tenants, and look up the lumber or coal resources instead."

"You make a paragon of landlords—for the tenants," laughed Dinah; and the eager, interested old gentleman who was bending over old maps of the district looked up to remark: "That is just like you, Don, like you always were; but those ideas are too utopian for this age and this region. The mountaineers themselves will only think you a mild sort of lunatic if you begin with them that way. Be practical and level-headed, my boy; don't be too quick to consign your pearls to the trough."

"Especially if they are ever likely to be worth the wearing," added Dinah.

But the placid-faced, pretty old lady, who was calmly laying high-lights of crimson on the écru roofs of impossible cottages, smiled on him kindly.

"Never mind their sordid practicalities, Don; they are both very wise, no doubt, but people sometimes find their best wisdom in their hearts. May be you are one of that kind."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A DEATH ON THE MOUNTAIN.

"Auntie, I will want to borrow your biggest piece of canvas and whole stock of materials. Genius burns in me this morning. I have found a model inspiring."

"Mr. March insisted that you would."

"Oh, it was types for literary work, not painting, that he meant, and just now I have seen the first specimen that looks promising for either—a faun of the Alleghanies, Auntie, with the profile of a Hermes; he is really an event."

"Who is the event?" inquired Don, coming in from the stables. "Your enthusiasm makes me jealous."

"Look out of that window toward the kitchen porch. Isn't he a picture?"

The picture was that of a young man of twenty-five or more, a mountaineer, but with a slight theatrical tinge in the dress that was really picturesque, though it might have been the handsome, unusual face and head that made it seem so. Boots soiled with the clay came to the knees over breeches of light corduroy; a cartridge-belt circled a waist that was lithe and flexible as a deer-hound's; a maroon shirt

exposed a bit of the throat, that was white as a baby's where the sun had not kissed it; a dark hat, with wide, flexible brim, shaded hair that was the warmest of blonde—the red gold that is seldom seen on any but a child's head. And as he stood nonchalantly with one foot on the porch-step, his gun resting across his straight shoulders, he really was enough to win a second glance from an artist.

"And his eyes are blue as violets," whispered the girl. "He looked up at the window as he passed, and my heart was won in a glance. Find out who he is, Don; I am going to have that face as a model if I have to make love to the man to get it."

"Dinah!"

"Well, I will, Auntie. You have complained ever since we came because I don't paint. You will have cause no longer, if I can only prevail on that Greek-featured treasure to sit for me. I do wonder what he is."

"A handsome nonentity, likely," ventured Don. The honest working-people here have little time to study such effective combinations of costume and attitude. I can't see his face from here, but the figure looks familiar."

Just then the subject of their curiosity, who had been talking to someone through the window, walked up the two steps, seated himself on the edge of the porch, and taking off his wide hat for a fan, turned his head so that they could see the gold-red hair and the features Dinah had named over. Don turned away from the view with a laugh.

"Oh, yes, I can introduce him to you and disenchant you as soon as you like. It is one of my tenants, and not one of the best of them, either."

"If Dinah had guessed you had such bits of perfection among your mountain people, she would not have let you go alone on so many of your rides," nodded Aunt Lottie,



sagaciously. "And he is really a good study for both color and form."

"But what is he?" persisted the girl.

"A good-looking renegade," answered his landlord. "He lives back in the timber near Indian Ledge; makes a pretense of farming a little and blacksmithing a little, though it is generally conceded that he doesn't depend on those trades for his living. Just what he does depend on I have not heard expressed yet, but imagine the natives think it illicit distilling or counterfeiting. Evidently no one hunts for proof of the supposition."

"Why, he has a face that is almost boyish," remarked Miss Lottie, taking another look at the questionable character.

"That is the effect of the yellow hair, I suppose. But he isn't too much of a boy to be an ugly customer to handle, and I hear he has a wife that he acts like a brute toward. Does that dim his attractions in your feminine souls?"

"He doesn't look brutal," contested Dinah.

"He doesn't look as though he would pepper a man with shot on slight provocation, either, but I hear he has done it."

"Well, if the man has not a shred of character nor a virtue to fall back on, it can not alter the lines of his face," decided the girl, who was hastily sketching the figure on the porch; "and then he may have a Tartar of a wife."

"Never heard anything about her, but of this gentleman and his grandmother I have heard enough to wish they lived in some other district. But I'll go down and have him look at the plates that are on that colt, and eventually you may have opportunities of studying those outlines you are enamored of."

And a little later the blonde mountaineer and Edson

were talking together, as they sauntered down to the field where the young stock grazed.

"Are you hunting?" asked Don. "I see you carry a gun."

"Hunting? Naw, don't know as I was; but a gun's handy."

The eyes that Dinah likened to violets had a way of glancing stealthily about him and at the people he met, and he favored his landlord with several of those surveys as Don picked out the colt needing their attention. He noticed the muscular, elastic limbs as they leaped over the fence, and the hands that were white enough for his contempt yet held the unwilling three-year-old as with iron fingers; and involuntarily the scarlet, almost boyish lips gave forth a low whistle of surprise.

"Appears to me you're a good mountaineer spoiled," was the finish of the survey and the whistle. "You hain't the grip of most city men—not the most I've seen."

"May be the ones you met were not fair specimens."

"Don't know—don't know, I'm sure;" and the violet orbs traveled up and down as if measuring the possible strength of a probable adversary. "Some of them look mighty peaked, but I can't say as you do—not when you're in action."

The attitude of the two men during their slight knowledge of each other had a sort of undefined antagonism in it. Don had, without knowing why, a separate and distinct feeling against the man different from that aroused by any of the natives of combative tendencies. The only tangible thing he could base his antipathy on was the contempt inspired by the lithe deer-hound with its trappings of a peacock—while the mountaineer's tone was half reluctant as in his surprise he gave acknowledgment of the other's physical advantages; but having broken the ice

with that grudging compliment, he followed it up by a more communicative manner.

"Naw, I ain't hunting," he said, taking up the dropped thread of conversation; "but as I was sightin' around the mountain, big Bill Riker, he come up to me on the other side, askin' if I'd bring the word that his girl Addyliny died last night. His woman, she wants preachin' at the house, and wanted I should tell the folks here to your place and they could get word down to the preacher. So my trip's over, I'll be gettin' back. Yes, I'll fix that colt's foot some day for you."

"Who was it that died?" asked Don as the other turned away.

"Bill Riker's girl Addy; she was most fourteen and a big help. Bill's in hard luck all round lately—like to be sold out by sheriff next week. They'll have preachin' to-morrow; reckon you'll climb over the mountain for it?"

The question was rather satirical, and the smile that accompanied it was altogether so. The mountaineer evidently deemed it the last thing probable that the man of the world would care for either the sorrow or gladness of the people in the hills, and he looked inclined to whistle again when Don answered:

"I surely will. Thank you for letting me know."

And a little later he called through the window to the ladies: "I may be away at lunch-time, but will get back in season for your drive; so don't rank me as a deserter."

"Going back into the timber with Adonis?" queried Miss Floyd, peering through the vines.

"No; he has vanished for to-day. I am going down the mountain, and will bring back our new clerical friend, Mr. Winston, if he can come. There is a death on the mountain, and he will be needed to-morrow, anyway."

"A death on the mountain," repeated the girl a little

later to Miss Lottie. "I declare, Don acts as though he were personally responsible by the way he said that. Of course it is rather fine in him to show that sort of interest in those people, but it is a bit ridiculous when one knows how chilling their reception of him has been."

"I do not imagine he would care much for the ridiculous appearance of it if he was only able to understand the people better—no, I don't mean that, either—but if he could only manage to make them understand him better."

"He never will," said the girl, promptly; "he has brought too much sentiment into his theories of them, and that is a useless commodity here. I never knew Don had so much sentiment as I have seen crop out in his dealings with those people—a queer place for it to make itself manifest."

"Perhaps the contact with primitive life awakens the primitive feelings," ventured the little lady, "and we worldlings have educated ourselves out of comprehending them."

"No danger of you not comprehending," returned Dinah, "because you are more than sentimental yourself—you are romantic; but Don—well, Don is growing interesting to me these days, because he is growing puzzling."

"Ah, my dear, what a pity you two could not have—"

"Yes, I know what you were going to say," broke in the girl; "and what a pity you and Donald Senior bored each of us for so many moons with an account of the other's perfections. Auntie, I'm afraid you have extinguished a match that will have to wait now for heaven."

"Oh, Dinah, do you think—"

"I never exert my brain to that extent," laughed the girl, kissing the pretty, distressed face of the old lady, "and neither must you, Miss Romantic. By the way, I believe I shall turn over to you a task Mr. March left with me, the gathering up of things interesting in the hills for a work of fiction; in a rash moment I promised, but I am a failure."

"And do you mean to acknowledge, Dinah Floyd, that you are snubbing Don—and—and others just because—you have a personal interest in the work of—of that—"

"Degenerate hanger-on of letters," supplied the young lady, "or blood-stained—I mean ink-stained—caricaturist; either would fit the ruffian equally well; and as to my own interest in that direction, just spare my blushes, won't you?—the blushes I haven't got. I am going to make myself altogether beautiful before Mr. Winston comes. With the exception of that aureoled Adonis, he is the most interesting creature I've seen here."

And leaving the little lady ten deep in water-colors and perplexity, she vanished. And her toilet was not love's labor lost, for their new clerical friend did come back with Don, who had taken a liking to talk with him over the affairs of his parishioners; the only trouble was that back in the hills they were too few in number.

"Spiritually there seems little chance of reaching them yet," he acknowledged, regretfully; "their lives are steeped in a sort of content that keeps any spiritual want from them—the material is yet all powerful. There is not much pretension to religious feeling, except by the women. Even then it is of the cold, stereotyped order. Bigoted, though, they have no enthusiasm, or if they have they are so smothered by timidity or lack of local precedent that it never comes to the surface. They are not emotional enough for the religious revivals that take a strong hold on the people of the settlements."

"But comparing the emotional crowds down below and the unemotional few up here, in which would you find the best lives?"

The clergyman's delicately veined brow ruffled with perplexity.

"You are asking me something, Mr. Edson, that never

occurred to me before," he said, slowly; "and it is worth one's thought, too. Of the people below I have not much personal knowledge; they are mostly from the foreign element that the coal work brings there; then they are somewhat transitory—their good and evil as well. But up here it is different. Two-thirds of the names in the hills have been heard there for generations, and they keep so closely the attributes of their ancestry that, whether good or bad, it would be a mighty work to attempt changing their ways of life; their faults and virtues are rooted in the soil here."

"So Don has learned," remarked Dinah.

Mr. Winston's kindly face kindled with a quizzical smile; evidently Don's accumulation of knowledge in that direction was no secret.

"But they have their virtues," he added, earnestly, "and they are sturdy as their vices. They are virtuous, surely, beyond the virtue of the crowds, and beyond their own spirituality or mentality, at the same time that they have a looseness of moral code that in an incomprehensible way runs parallel with a queer sort of honesty. For instance, a man may steal timber off another person's ground and suffer no loss of caste in the eyes of his neighbors, but if he is known to steal a hog or a sheep, or even a chicken, it is a slur on him not easy to be got rid of. Taking them as a class, they are full of contradictions; but the more flagrantly dishonest are those who have drifted away from the hills and brought back vice from the world outside."

"Well, when even the honest ones may steal timber," began Dinah, dubiously.

"No, I do not say the honest ones do so," corrected Mr. Winston, smiling; but they simply follow what has become a matter of habit. Since the time of the Indian, tomahawk claims and shotgun policy have been powers in the wood country. It is only of late that boundaries

through the timber have become distinct things, and they are too new to win the respect of natives whose forefathers owned the mountain, by courage if not legality. There are so many things to consider, that one can do little toward presenting the morally legal point of view to them. Time will do what words will not, and the wildness of the forests must be broken before you can drive out old customs; they will stick like the wildcats so long as the ledges are here for them to creep under."

The evening, social and pleasant, wore on; the dusk crept from the east, and the evening star hung like a jewel in its meshes. But while the conversation drifted from the local present of the whites to the local past of the people whose color is even unknown to us—the builders of vanished forts within whose space strange ancient trees still grow—Don somehow dropped out of the conversation. Mr. Winston's summing up of the traits of the people he had to deal with had put him into a brown study, one in which golden gleams of light were needed to bring harmony.

"Don is in dreamland," said Miss Lottie, nodding toward the still form in the corner of the porch, while Dinah made some remark about "spring fever" and its effect on people who were constitutionally lazy to begin with.

"I never knew, however, that it deprived people of speech entirely," she added. He aroused himself and smiled around at them.

"Don't mind me," he entreated. "I am not sleeping, nor nearly so far away from your themes as you imagine. Some of them have taken possession of me, and I was only thinking."

And he was "only thinking" next morning, when the sun bewitched the mists up from the valley, and he rode rather silently beside Mr. Winston over the mountain.

That conversation the night before had helped him to some ideas about the people he had to deal with, and he needed them.

He found himself confronted by technicalities and responsibilities that would need a more practiced hand than his to grasp, unless some clearer insight should lead him into the comprehension of the people.

All knowledge of books or the world he had lived in was of no help here. He was looked on as a "greenhorn," and he knew it. He could have settled several questions by law and established a reputation for hard-headedness, but he would look in the rude cabins and in the faces of barefooted children, and then ride away leaving them on their native heath; and even his friends had begun to laugh over the hopelessness of his endeavors. If only his past years of trifling had not told so against him—if only someone had shown faith; but the lack of it was drifting his own far afield. Mr. Winston's ideas of the people had not helped him in that respect, but they had given him some thoughts of the people that were new; they had been humming in his brain all night.

The house of Riker was neither on the mountain nor in the valley, but just on the border of each; and a Sabbath stillness lay about it, over the sunlit clearing and the few horses hitched to the rickety fence. The children, a bevy of yellow heads and thin, flail-like legs, were grouped about the corners of the chimney, with furtive eyes, as if poised for instant abashed flight, as each new-comer emerged from the forest above them, or tramped up along the rocky, bushy township road that passed the stable.

Out at the wood-pile, the men were gathered, "hunkered" down on the ground or perched against the fence, talking in rather subdued tones, because of the young dead thing that lay in the shadowy corner of the cabin.



The women, and a few shy, uneasy children with sun-bonnets on, were standing about the door, exchanging remarks of the health or sickness prevalent to the season. One old brown-faced creature, with the pathos of eye that Angelo gave the shearwoman of the Fates, covered the confined face with a white handkerchief, and laid her unsteady hand with a little pat of condolence on the mother's shoulder. Her voice, in the kindly, stereotyped phrases with which people think to ease despairing grief, fell on the ears at the door, and though the words were not distinguishable to them, the meaning was, and they checked the desultory exchange of remarks and bent sympathetic heads in embarrassed respect.

One woman, or it may have been a girl, was close enough to hear those words of attempted comfort. She sat somewhat apart from the rest, at the head of the coffin, every now and then driving away a fly that persisted in returning. She had been there when the earliest of the other women had come in the morning. Some of them had spoken to her in a subdued, equivocal way, not as though they knew her, but rather divined who she must be; and as she sat there close to the wall, the coffin on trestles of chairs looked like a barrier between herself and the others. The face could scarcely be seen in the great shadows of a slab bonnet that had surely been made for a larger head than hers; but the mouth and chin emerging from the shadows were too softly curved to belong to other than youth. The mouth even grew tremulous with sympathy as the words of the old woman reached her. She was speaking of the other children who were left, of the one little baby in the cradle that they all agreed was like Addy had been at her age. There were some words, too, of the love of the Christ for little children and the surety of Addy being safe up there, and awaiting the others who were left; and

the figure by the coffin grew quite still and rigid in the intentness of listening to the homely comfort.

And then the baby spoken of stirred in its box-cradle, and before its little wail could break the fraughtful silence, the girl from the corner had crossed the room and gathered it in her arms without disturbing another that slept beside it. She stilled its querulous protest as if by some mesmeric touch, and stepped softly with it back to her place by the wall.

The mother, with strained, tearless eyes, was looking out of the little square window into the truck-patch, where some nodding jonquils and young onions grew side by side; but she saw none of the springing green or the gold of the blossoms, her own loss loomed too close, blotting out all but despair from her gaze. Her lips twitched convulsively, as if attempting to give answer to the speech of the old woman, but no words came. With a pathetically dumb movement, she raised the corner of a rusty black apron and pressed it and her work-worn hands against her mouth, rocking to and fro silently; and the old neighbor looked at her, shaking her head over this suppressed rebellion against "The Will," and sat down near her, looking about and noting the floor that was clean-scrubbed, and the posts of the bed protruding from the hole in the loft, where it had been moved from down-stairs to make room for the gathering. But the quiet girl with the baby raised her eyes again and again to the face of the mother. There seemed something contagious to her in that nervous twitching of the piteous mouth, for twice she half arose from the low chair, but the heads of the women at the door turned toward her at each movement, and with a little deprecating cough she sat down again; but from the window a short indrawn breath, that was half a sob, brought her to her feet, and

with the intuition of sympathy she laid the round-eyed little mite on the black-draped knee.

"She's been wanting you," she said, in a low, apologetic sort of way. "It don't appear that she is rightly content anywhere if she can't see *your* face."

The woman nodded silently, not even raising her red miserable eyes to see who it was brought the child; and then the little whimper of the babe ended in a crow of gladness, and one little fist was laid coaxingly on her breast; and the laughter of the child was the key to the repressed sobs that seemed strangling her, for with a wail that was pitiful, but with tears that were merciful, the child was raised to her bosom and pressed again and again as a balm to the aching heart.

The women looked uneasily at each other. They felt someone ought to stop her from crying like that. The old woman said: "Now, Becky Ann!" but did not approach her. She felt her functions somewhat interfered with by that "slip of a thing" who stood still at the chair of Becky Ann, and, without looking at the others, gave them an idea that she did not intend to move away for any of them.

"Seems like she just naturally set Mrs. Riker a-cryin' on purpose," complained one whispering voice to another at the door. "Some folks have so little gumption!"

"Becky Ann was bearin' her loss mighty well, too, if she'd only been let alone. Hasn't cried a whimper sence I come; jest went around quiet without a word to say. To tell the truth" (and the speaker's voice dropped somewhat), "she didn't even speak to Bill when he asked her where little Jake's pants were; jest pointed to the chest under the ladder, with nary a word."

"That ain't so curious, either," interposed a third, "for I did hear tell as she and Bill have been havin' trouble

'mongst themselves lately; but you'd naturally think she'd speak to him at a time like this."

"Times don't matter much, I reckon, to Becky Ann Riker," nodded another in a conclusive whisper. "She was one of Jake Tygert's girls, and many's the time I've heard the sayin', 'As stubborn as a Tygert;' so she comes honest enough by her tempers."

"Well, well, it's curious how people can't live together peaceable, as the Lord intended," drawled the sanctimonious tones of a hatchet-faced woman who looked equal to enforcing peace in her own family, even if it had to be done with a club.

No answer was returned to this remark; and the soft silence had grown a bit oppressive—as it will where the air is charged with the electricity of unuttered feelings. From the wood-pile a low hum came, as the sound of bees' wings that intensifies the stillness; and then from the wood pasture came the flash of a sound through the silence, and a couple of the women at the door moved nervously and gazed at each other with wide eyes.

"I declare, it sounded like something that's human," faltered one of them with a superstitious shiver, while one of the braver smiled indulgently.

"Laws! it's only a calf bawling for the cow, I s'pose. I noticed it as we come—a little speckled one. Yes, did sound some like a person."

"That's Jinny," volunteered one of the shy young Rikers. "Jinny, she was Addy's calf, and she's just been *goin'* on!"

The women glanced at each other, with significant dread in their faces and warning nods toward the children, who did not heed much the wail-like bleat, and it continued, wavering and pitiful, until a tall fellow emerged from the rickety log stable and came slowly up to the door. His sad eyes noted a couple of the women whom he had not

seen earlier, and he nodded to them and passed in, his gaze turning instinctively, disconsolately, toward that corner where his pride, his eldest child, lay—the one he had always called his “boy.”

“Becky Ann,” he said, lowly, “Jinny’s calling out there again like she never would stop. Ain’t there something or other I could give her?—some bran and milk, may be.”

The girl beside her stepped aside at the sound of the husband’s voice, but touched the wife on the shoulder as she did so.

“’Tain’t bran she wants, an’ ’tain’t milk,” answered the mother, pressing the baby closer; and then, hearing no reply, she raised her eyes and saw him shaking his head, but with his face turned toward the fire-place, that they might not know that his speech was checked by tears. And then Becky Ann arose and went over to the hearth.

“May be it might quiet her some, though, and I’ll—I’ll take the baby, Will, and go along.”

He looked at her, and their tear-stained faces for the time banished the “Tygert stubbornness,” for when he lifted the bucket of milk from the table Becky Ann walked out beside him down to the wood pasture; and just as she reached the door the girl who had given her the child crossed the floor, and taking the big bonnet from her own head, set it on Becky Ann’s and returned bareheaded to the chair in the shadows.

And then after a little there was a slight stir about the wood-pile and porch, and the word of “the preacher’s coming” was passed from one to another as a sort of signal for a general uprising and stretching of limbs and attempted poses of unconsciousness. But several of them gained a more alert air as the companion of the preacher was recognized.

“What’s bringin’ that young Edson here, I’d like to

know," growled one of Edson's tenants from the wood-pile.

"Spyin' around," ventured another. "Don't reckon swells of his style care about ridin' round to funerals as a general thing. Blest if he ain't goin' right down to the fence and shakin' hands with Riker and his wife ahead of the preacher! Well, he ain't noways backward, anyway."

As they entered the house, Don was struck as never before with the meagreness of the life that is wrested from the bit of cleared ground when there is a houseful of growing children to clothe and feed with one man's labor—the bareness of it all was so intensified by the bare coffin in the corner. He thought with a sort of shame of the luxuries of life he had accepted so long as a matter of course, while here had died a fair blossom of a girl fated to hard labor and these harsh surroundings all the days she had lived. And that mother, with the piteous, tear-wet, weather-worn face! And the hand she had held out that was so much browner and rougher than his own! All his sympathies went out to them. Would the time ever come, though he worked among them all his life, that he could help their lives to any added brightness?

But he had grown hopeless, so hopeless that he had then in his pocket a letter addressed to the senior telling him to send a business agent; that he himself was not a success. The letter was forty-eight hours old, and unsent; yet it was there, its contents proving his own state of mind. And the thought of it was with him all that sunlit morning through the ride over the mountain, its nearness strengthened by glances and whispers that were directed toward him by the men and women who came in with the quiet, severe manner adopted by so many at the door of a church, ranging themselves on improvised seats of plank, while Mr. Winston and the parents exchanged low, half-whis-

pered words at the head of the coffin; and Don somehow found himself there, too, looking down on the chill sleep of the child.

And very beautiful Addy looked, with the faint amethyst shadows about the eyes lending a pensiveness to the face that they said had been a saucy one—and there was still the hint about her lips of a smile audacious. One cycle nearer eternal wisdom, the dead can always smile at the futility of tears.

Someone pushed past Don as he stood gazing into the still face, and a bunch of flowers was laid against the cold cheek. They were tiny white lilies that grow in the high places, and the dew was still on them, shining softly against the brown hand that offered them. It was a large hand—large and rough; and Don looked up into the face of its owner and met the gaze of the perplexing greenish-gray eyes whose steadiness Dinah had objected to. It was the man called "Bud," and this native of the hills and the man of the world met for the first time at the open coffin.

Don returned the steady, curious gaze and bent his head in silent greeting, but the other only closed his eyes for an instant, and when he opened them it was to look down in Addy's face, nod to someone back in the corner, and turn away—only the tiny, bell-like lilies left to prove that he had really stood there at all; and Don's hand went mechanically up to the lapel of his coat, where Dinah had fastened a white rose, and the fragrant symbol of silence was laid beside the lilies of the mountain.

When he turned to a seat, he found one had been assigned him beside Mr. Winston, in the corner by the fire-place—the place of honor—facing the door and the assembly.

There was a prayer by the minister, earnest and full of feeling, as prayer is apt to be in the presence of death,

when the magnetism of the near living brings sympathy to priests such as seldom comes to them across the spacious aisles of vast temples; and Don found the man he had known only as a bright, clever companion rising from his knees with unaffected tears in his eyes, and heard him, as in a dream, say: "Will you, Mr. Edson, select a hymn?"

Wordless, Don reached for the book, and in a sort of maze at officiating in such a rôle, he found himself reading aloud the first and last verses of the psalm beginning, "*I to the hills will lift mine eyes.*"

Mr. Winston, who had leaned his head on his hand, only raised it to nod approval as the reading was ended, and then, still feeling in an unreal, exalted atmosphere, Don found himself singing the words, and singing alone.

There may have been some among the people who knew the hymn, and would have joined in it within the walls of a church; but within the walls of their church that was their school-house none had ever heard singing like the voice that mounted upward with the assurance of God's presence.

He felt in an instinctive way that turning of wondering faces to each other; he felt the silence by the window where the short, sobbing breaths of Becky Ann had trembled; he felt the something that crept from his own heart into his throat, and then into his eyes; and he could see none of the faces—his gaze was over their heads into the shadowy corner where the dead child lay, and where he found himself, suddenly as if magnetized, gazing into a pair of hungry, yearning eyes that had kindled in their setting of a pale face as if from some inward fire inexhaustible. Was it religious fervor that shone through those eyes so? Was it abiding faith he had awakened by his voice? And was the possessor of it herself startled by its strange force, that she arose to her feet mechanically, as



sleep-walkers do, and then stepped back in that deprecating way, her girlish, pathetic face never turning from his own? He did not know; but all those fancies flitted through his senses that instant while their eyes met, and he found himself strengthened in an exalted sort of way by the spirit in hers. He sung the closing lines of the moon by night, while he seemed to see but a pale star shining in the morning.

The stiffness as he sat down was intense, and was broken only by the slightest of rustles in that shadowy corner; but he did not look in that direction again. He could see the eyes and the hunger in them with his own closed, and his own perplexities kept them so.

But outside the house there was one man whose eyes were not closed to those meeting glances; it was the man Bud, who had been drawn by the melody as by a charm until he stood just without the window, and who looked, first of all, to that corner, as one's glances turn to a friend who we know will share with us appreciation of a beauty. But the kindly anticipation froze from his face as he saw the slight, erect figure there, and the eager, awakening light in its eyes. His own followed them, and read in those of the singer that the song was sung at that moment to but one in the roomful of people who wondered at the beauty of it.

He stood there like a statue through the rest of the service, but he saw no more their looks turned toward each other. She listened, with her eyes on the floor, to the rest of the service—wavering, embarrassed glances given when the last word of prayer was uttered and the people stirred with the slight commotion significant of the finish.

And then Bill Riker arose from the seat beside his wife, laying his hand lightly on her shoulder, and turned to Mr. Winston.

"We—we'd like, if it's agreeable—if Mr. Edson would sing again, *she'd* like it"—and he nodded his head toward Becky Ann; "and if you would—"

The people remained standing while again the voice that was wonderful to them sung the confession of—

"As pants the hart for cooling streams."

Once his glance wandered across to that corner whence a sort of inspiration had come to him, but he saw only a bent head half-turned away, but listening—surely listening—if one could judge by the intentness of the drooped face; and the man at the window, who seemed to see everything with those green-gray eyes of his, noted its earnestness, and turned away with a trouble added to the perplexity of his face.

As the sad cortege wound up the rocky township road, Don turned in the saddle for a look backward to the edge of the valley, where a few neighbors yet lingered about the cabin—the few for whom there had been no room in the limited list of conveyances. They stood in straggling groups about the door and out along the lane; and where the clearing of "new ground" joined the forest, he saw two forms disappear in the green ocean of leaves, one a very large, heavy-shouldered man, who walked with his head bent, and beside him was a slim, girlish figure with an immense sun-bonnet on its head; and as they crossed the rail fence he could see that on one arm the man carried a slight bundle that looked like a baby.

Don wondered which of the figures back there belonged to the girl with the eyes, but, strangely enough, he felt a hesitation about questioning on that subject. He had not seen her after the services were ended; but just to remember the eyes and the exaltation of faith in them was enough for the present—just that, and to have found through her one key by which he might unlock the barriers those people

had thrown between themselves and him! Yes, it seemed a great deal just then; and some of the darting fancies in his brain were sweet as the faith in that semi-childlike face—the faith that had so glad a look it might have been a welcome.

It was all very puzzling. He was riding in the line of a funeral, and was not careless of the solemnity of the fact; but some warm, delicious sprite of hope was singing to him through every bird-song, and blushing pink at him from every azalia-bush—and all because of two pathetic eyes in a pale face.

Mr. Winston looked at him rather intently as they rode abreast, and then:

“Mr. Edson, I knew you were a musician, but I never dreamed you had such a voice as you let us hear back there. It is wonderful.”

“It has been wonderfully still for a long time,” said Don. “I sing little of late.”

They rode on in silence for a little while, and then the clergyman again spoke.

“Do you remember our conversation last evening of the unemotional natures of the people up here—how difficult it was to touch most of them in a spiritual sense?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I am inclined to take back something of that. From the impression left by your singing, I am inclined to think it their preacher who has failed in not finding the way to their hearts or sympathies. You found it this morning, without effort and without intent.”

“Oh, I don’t know—”

“I know,” said Mr. Winston, loyally decided; it shone in their faces, and sounded in that man’s voice when he asked you to sing again, as if it brought a comfort to them. You undervalue the thing I have tried for and failed to

and here. If I had your gift of voice, I would never despair again of touching hearts to the sympathies that seek spirituality. Music, music that touches, is a wonderful power. Never undervalue any gift of God; and your voice is that. But I fear it is a gift you will let go to waste here in the hills;" but the interrogation in the voice said plainly: "Will you let it go to waste here in the hills?"

The man who had felt so like an alien among them until this odorous, peace-kissed morning was looking at a letter pulled from his pocket with a handkerchief—a letter sealed and addressed, which he twisted in his fingers until envelope and inclosure were broken past repair; and then he dropped it in his pocket with a rather preoccupied smile in his eyes.

"I hope not," he said; and the clergyman, remembering how full of feeling and sympathy the man's voice had been in music, wondered at the carelessness of it when its own powers for good were under discussion.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE PAGAN.

"Don, who is the Pagan?"

It was two days after the funeral, and it was Dinah who asked the question; while Miss Lottie looked across the breakfast-table to him, with a little laugh. "Yes, we met a queer old character last evening. Dinah stopped the buggy and chatted with him, and after gossiping about—and I must say slandering—everyone around here, he told us he was 'Pap' Keesy, and that he lives, or eats, mostly at the Pagan's; and he had not many good words to say for that person, either."

"That is nothing," returned Don. "The most of them slander each other. The valley folks come to me with tales of the mountaineers stealing timber, while the highlanders retaliate by swearing that the lowlanders kill more hogs every winter than belongs to them, and then they all club together and make life uneasy for any settlement folks that wander up here; and so it goes on. I've seen Mr. Keesy, who entertained you—a shambling old hook-nosed skeleton of a man. Yes, he's a gentleman of leisure; just lives around among the people, and tells 'whoppers' about them all."

"But the Pagan?" repeated Dinah.

"Oh, he? I never met him yet; some mountaineer who turned atheist, I believe. Some say he's a wizard, because of his knowledge of herb-cures. I've heard of him several times, but he don't live on our land. Don't know that he is an atheist, either—someone told me he had a sort of religion; but I guess he's queer mentally."

"We heard about the queerness," said Dinah; "and I'm rather glad to hear that 'Pap' is not reliable, though he is so newsy, for he was enlightening us as to your queer speculations over in the timber."

Don's face flushed a little, though he held out his cup carelessly for more coffee.

"And what are they?"

Dinah looked at him sharply. "You are not going to tell me that it's true, are you," she demanded, "that you did go over to Riker's and buy up all the stock he owned to save them from sheriff's sale, and then made him a present of them?"

"Not quite a present, but I did buy the stock."

"Don Edson!"

"Well, now, what was a fellow to do?" he asked, appealingly. "I am weak, and I know it; but when I heard the

story of the man's sickness last winter—such a fine manly sort of fellow—and the debts that he was unable to meet, and the family there to look after, and just the little bit of live-stock to depend on—well, it was too much for your humble servant. I fished in my pocket for the requisite, and Riker rejoices in the animals, from which I am to get my dividends in days to come; and for once the venerable Keesy told the truth."

Yes, it was quite true—a truth that had left a stamp of tranquillity for awhile over the brows of the mountaineer, so used to sad wrinklins in the endeavor to make two long disputin ends meet. It was all so quickly done and so unexpected that Riker, even after days had gone by, could scarcely believe in the actuality of the change, and would stop in his work of laying the "worm" for the new fence and stare long and contemplatively at the chestnut rails, as if to get from them an explanation of the good luck that had come his way.

"A fine precedent you have planted," remarked Dinah. "It is likely to breed you contention here at about double the increase of Canada thistles. You can't manage any of the others now unless you give them a calf or a pig more than you gave Riker."

"But I did not *give* them to him," protested Don. "Wait three years, and see what a return I will have. I will develop into an extensive stock-raiser yet."

"Three years!" said the girl. "Then you have actually tied yourself down to this place for that length of time?"

"It looks so, don't it?" he queried, trying to smile away her disapproval; "especially when I have offered up all my spare dollars on the shrine of this experiment, for I am not sure I have quite money enough left to pay car-fare in any direction."

He pulled out a few bits of silver from his pocket, and eyed them regretfully.

"Where is your big penny?" demanded Miss Dinah, severely.

"There it is, in the very bottom of the pocket."

"Where your luck is likely to stay, judging from your late demented actions. What possessed you, Don?"

"I think it was my old stumbling-block," he confessed, laughingly; "perhaps my vanity, for I sung for them, and just happened to be in the mood for my best, and the moment they showed themselves impressed, they had won me. I can always find some way of understanding people who are touched by music."

"By your music," was the unkind addition of the young lady.

"Perhaps. I don't deny that it may be all a bit of vanity, after all, and it has left me such a bankrupt I shall have to take to the woods to live."

"Surely, Don, just now, when brother is about to bundle up his notes and depart, you are not going to desert me, too?"

"My dear Aunt Lottie," he said, crossing over and seating himself at her diminutive feet, "my red-letter days would be the ones when I could ride over to see you; but being here constantly is so much too pleasant that I grow lazy through enjoyment, and I do no work."

"How much nicer that sounds than to tell us we bore him into taking to the woods to get rid of us," murmured the younger lady.

And then, though thinking her words half in jest, he turned on her impatiently:

"Dinah, do you really disbelieve in everything and everybody, or is it only a fashion you think is amusing to adopt? Anyway, it is a fashion that can make your friends feel very uncomfortable sometimes, and very worthless."

And without giving that much-amazed young lady time to recover her powers of speech, he slipped his hand affectionately into Miss Lottie's and took his departure.

The June wind, odorous from its sweet, shadowy nesting-places, was blowing straight across the deep valley to him as he led his horse out from the stable-yard. There were many things for him to do, several places for him to go, and he halted between choosing, until swayed by the wind as by impulse, he turned his face toward its kisses; and they were drifting from the wild mountain, as Dinah had dubbed it—the timbered mountain of Don's "wild" hopes.

"What a way she has of taking all hope out of a fellow," he thought, vexatiously, as he cantered along the dip in the hills where Washington congratulated himself on finding so charming a place for a military encampment.

The old encampment has still its admirers, and in the hot months and the hunting-season the building on the old site has numerous pilgrims from the paving-stones.

The bracing air of the mountain, as he went up, up along its shadowed side, blew away vexing queries, or vexatious sprites such as stung him through Dinah's speech. He was riding over the road he had come that morning with Mr. Winston, and with the memory of it came the delicious thrill of sympathy that had touched him through that visit to the cabin at the edge of the valley.

"Was it only vanity?" Within the four walls of Miss Lottie's room he had laughed and agreed to it, half-believing his own words; but alone with the mystery of the hills, and the sense of the secrets they tell to none, he did not feel like laughing, or even like striving for an explanation. What use to try to put into words the finer impulses that come to us—so often they are untranslatable. Just as the whisper of the leaves that bring us peace—but once shut in by a



roof from the sight or sound of them, how impossible to put into speech their caresses that soothe. And he bared his head to those caresses as he went upward through the shadowy places, and felt the dew dripping from the leaves like a benediction, and smiled to think of trying to express in words to those people back there the witchery of the hills and the subtle way in which they influence lives to otherwise impossible things.

"Ah, fancies! fancies!" he breathed, in sudden self-derision, "where will you have brought me this time next year? I might as well ask what is the outgrowth of the fancies a year old. But a man should have some other occupation than dreams. Will I ever catch up to the tangible things?"

As if to conjure up some of the tangible things, the alien resorted to the charm that is generally most potent for dreams—the lifting up of a voice that trilled and rung above the songs of the birds that were echoing carols on every side.

Dinah had called him a bit of a reprobate that morning, but threading the aisles of "God's first temples," his face was the face of a boy, and of light heart, and his voice was as the voice of an angel. He stopped once, suddenly, looking up at the branches in audacious rivalry, laughing aloud at the silence there, for the birds were really still, and a full minute went by ere their twitterings again began, and welled as before into a far-answering chorus; and then, content with his victory over his mates, he rode on, singing softly, crossing the summit that divides the copper-snake's range on the west side from the domain of its more honest relative, that sings you a warning and likes best the rising sun and the south wind; on through the columns of white-oaks, whose feet are caressed by feathers of fern in the long, desolate "bear-wallows;" on over the road he had passed

before, yet had to watch closely, the "blaze" being an imaginary sort of an affair recurring only at long intervals. Some of the intervals the owner of the road put in consigning to an unnamable place people who expected other people to travel on such roads as that was; other intervals were made melodious by the sweetness of an old plantation hymn he had stored in his memory from some Southern sojourn.

Suddenly, through a low refrain, peculiarly heart-touching, which he was rendering with a great deal of satisfaction at his own excellence, a serious "Good-morning!" almost at his elbow brought his heart in his mouth—there was something so uncanny in the voice coming from the seeming solitude.

The queer shock was not lessened when he saw within reach of his hand a man leaning against a tree that raised its head high up above the cliff of rock around which he was riding. It was the man whose eyes he had met at the coffin that morning—the man whose brown hand had made those lilies look doubly pure. Don had felt his graceless heart touched by the offer of those blossoms; but why need the creature look at one with those serious stares that may mean contemplative profundity, and might possibly be placid idiocy.

"The same to you," he retorted, reining in his beast, that had shied, as had his rider, at the unexpected figure; "but if you would just carry a bell, or some bit of warning, it would be an economy for the nerves of your neighbors—and I imagine we are neighbors?"

The other man smiled slightly at the gravity with which the mocking lips acknowledged nervousness.

"Yes, sir; I live in the hills, anyway. I heard you singing, and just stood there to listen."

"Um!—rooted to the ground, as it were," supposed

Mr. Edson, in mild self-laudation; "or was it the rock or the tree you were fastened to? May I ask if it is a steady habit of yours to plant yourself around in unexpected places in this sort of way—or," he added, "do you think it is too late to reform?"

The dark, serious face of the man warmed amusedly as these questions were put, and the gray-green eyes smiled at him indulgently.

"Most of my habits are steady ones," he acknowledged. "When folks get along in life, habits are hard things to change—may be you'll catch up with that knowledge yourself some day; but I'll try and not keep up the habit of frightening your beast."

Among all the soft, pleasant voices of the mountain folk, Don decided he had heard no man speak with the mild gentleness of this one, and yet there was mingled with it the calm insistence of a speaker whose speech is given audience—the bit of philosophy advanced with the confidence of a teacher; and the musical equestrian ran his eyes over this as yet unclassified specimen with the mental query of why he had never happened to meet it in the six weeks he had been riding around the country. Suddenly a convincing inspiration raised his brows somewhat.

"Perhaps I am wrong, but I am going to give a guess at your identity," he said, coolly. "Are you not the mountaineer who allowed to preach the gospel of Moses to your neighbors, and then veered around and struck a bargain with Lucifer, son of the morning, instead?"

"I reckon I'm the man you mean," was the answer to the gravely quizzical question. "My name is Lennard."

"Ah! I guessed it. Well, Mr. Lennard, glad to know you; and if I get mired any deeper in my righteous endeavors, you will have a new disciple. May I ask," he added, dubiously, "if that forked stick you carry is the sign man-

nal of your shady employer? It looks a little like the pronged affairs the devils stir fires with—in pictures.”

“Yes,” agreed the man, “in pictures.” He had picked up the staff of white maple, and walked around the cliff ahead of the horse. Over his broad shoulder was slung a sack from which protruded a hammer, an adz, and a square-rule. In Don’s irreverent mind arose another picture—one of Joseph, the carpenter.

“Only to complete it I would have to wear petticoats,” was his mental addition as he followed in the wake of the other. “I wonder if he is too sensitive to answer the question of the embryo pitchfork?”

But as they reached the level above the cliff, the level carpeted with mountain-tea and rabbit-berries, and thick with rustling laurel, the mountaineer halted.

“When you get up here on top of the rocks, especially on a hot day when the place gets rightly warmed up, you’re more than likely to find out the use of a stick like this,” he observed. “I carry it for snakes.”

“Here?” and Mr. Edson’s eyes sought the sun-flecked carpet warily.

“Sometimes—in fact, it’s always safe to keep a lookout for them on this side of the mountain; they travel a good bit after the thunder wakes them up, and on till the frost comes. The den is over that other ridge.”

“Oh, it is—a good thing to know and keep away from,” decided the owner of the domain mentioned. “A rattle-snake-den is a dubious thing to trade for—shouldn’t you think so? But as they are my property, I had best try cultivating them—don’t imagine they would recognize my right, though, any more than the other tenants.”

The man striding ahead seemed impervious to this light and airy persiflage. Might he be one of the ‘other’ tenants? The thought occurring to Don made him

grin comically, and then ask the question with conciliating gravity.

"No, sir," answered the disciple of Lucifer by his own acquiescence; "I never lived on any man's land but my own. Folks call it 'the bee-hive' sometimes, as it's so small a plat of ground; and I've gathered up fruit-trees out of the woods until it's full of them now—only room enough left for the bees and me."

"Oh, you keep bees?"

"Some—wild ones I've tolled there. A man can find most everything he wants to live on out of the timber, if only he's a mind to try and manage them."

"Um! that so?" queried Mr. Edson. "Do you know, Mr. Leopard—"

"My name is Lennard," corrected the man, quietly.

"Thanks. Well, as I was about to remark, your statement that a man can live easily on the fruits of the wilderness is among the most welcome news I've received out here. I may come to that myself, and then will look you up to teach me how to manage them."

"People can't get much of that kind of learning second-hand," remarked the garnerer of wild things. "You'd just have to live among them till you get to know them. But if ever I can help you, come for me. You've done a good turn for a man who needed it down there in the valley, and mountain folks ought to mind that of you."

"Bosh!" interjected the other, aggrievedly; "now you are bringing me right back to some nagging things I was delightfully singing myself away from when I met you. It's bad enough to repent of wickedness, but generally one only repents after he has had a jolly good time, and even then it's only for the bill he has to pay. But when a man repents of his good actions, he never has those recollections of jolly things to console him; he is told to look into the sweet

by and by for his recompense, but it's always a cloudy day about that time and he can't see far. Did you ever hear of a grumpy old fellow called Carlyle?"

"No, I think not."

"He didn't live around here," continued Mr. Edson, condescendingly, "but I hear he is a great thinker of thoughts—one of the thoughts occurred to me just now; it's a bit humbuggish to me—thought I'd ask if you knew him."

"No, the people I know tire their muscles sometimes—never their brains," said the man, with mild concision; "but the thought?" Evidently there was a bit of fascination for him in the ideas of a thinker, though he was exiled from them; it was, at any rate, the first thing he had cared to question of.

"The thought? Oh, yes; my own natural and righteous repentance made me remember it. Well, he's a bit of an advocate for sacrifice (in other people, my friend)—never heard of any heroic sacrifices *he* made; but he admonishes people to say good-bye to all kinds of happiness, that it is a very empty affair, and that with self-renunciation life begins. Well," continued Mr. Edson, with a confiding air, "I think the old man was after a mistaken idea that trip into his brain; but if he should be right and me wrong, I might—as my self-renunciation has brought me to the verge of bankruptcy—comfort myself by believing that in return life was about to begin—begin for me here on the mountain;" and he laughed softly at the idea. "I rather think I've lived through the most it has to offer."

The man ahead halted and looked up into the confidant, audacious face.

"Don't you be throwing out challenges to God," he said, with the quiet steadiness of a man who weighs his words, "or you may be offered something you'll have to take that

you're not reckoning on. I've seen it happen before to-day—all in justice, too."

Mr. Edson whistled gently at this reproof, and opened the audacious eyes a trifle wider.

"Natural advice from an orthodox," he agreed; "but I thought you belonged to the lot who leave God out of the universe. I've heard them call you—" He stopped short; fitful as he was to serious thought and flippantly as he treated it, his face flushed with impatience as he found his tongue running so far ahead of his discretion. "I really beg you pardon," he said, putting out his hand in an impulsive way, and with a smile winningly characteristic of his desire to please. "You speak like a gentleman, and I—like a fool; but if you can get used to the idea that I'm a harmless sort of a fool, we may get along all right together."

"I shouldn't wonder if we did," said the older man in the same quiet way, but closing his eyes for an instant, much as the other remembered him doing that first day; so he did not see the offered hand, Don supposed, and with a grimace and a sigh the unaccepted member was thrust in his pocket. "And you needn't feel bad about what they call me here," continued the man; "it's the 'Pagan,' I reckon. Yes, I've heard them. I don't mind it now. It isn't for not believing in God that these pious folks damn a man, or have the will to do it. It's enough for them to know that a man has his own opinion about the character of the Almighty, and can't in his soul see a justice and a lesson in the God Moses tells about. That was Moses' idea of what a God ought to be, I reckon, an' I fought for faith in it for a long time; but it's gone. The Almighty I'd try to reach is above tradin' blessings for sheep's blood. I ain't askin' any help from God, because I won't get it. I get a chance to work out my own salvation, jest as every other

human has to—for the sins o' this life an' the other lives before this."

"Oh, the other lives before this—yes," murmured Mr. Edson, eying the broad shoulders of this queer specimen of paganism, and wondering what his chances would be to get out of the way with a whole hide if the man's opinions were likely to render him combative as well as strongly assertive. Had he not heard that the "Pagan" was a little "touched" mentally? And the meeting in the timber began to have the savor of an adventure, and the contest between discretion and curiosity in the young man's mind was won by the latter when he ventured: "Those lives you spoke of just now—the lives before this—now do you know, Mr. Lennard, I haven't just as clear a recollection of mine as I would like to have."

"None of us have," announced the man, gravely, not seeing the quizzical expression on the other face. "None of us have seen the future life, either, I reckon—only in dreams, may be—but something tells us to believe in it; an' if our souls are immortal an' have no end, it's reasonable to ask where the beginning of it was. I don't know what your feelings tell you about it, but mine tell me I was in this world before; not just remembrance, but kind o' feelings when you come to places, an' people, an' thoughts in books that you know have been something to you, but you haven't got the record right clear enough to tell just when. Could you tell me true"—and he stopped squarely and looked up at his listener—"could you tell me true, an' say that you haven't ever come to faces an' eyes—especially eyes—that set you thinking like that?"

"Especially eyes!" Don tried to look down nonchalantly into the questioning ones raised to him, and failed utterly. What curious eyes they were, with the green glints across the gray like an agate he had seen somewhere



—but where? or might it have been the eyes themselves? He felt a swift chill touch him as he tried to take his eyes away from those other compelling ones, and could not. He knew a dizziness as though the earth was coming up to meet him, and the spell was broken by the clasp of a hand on his wrist.

“There! we’ll drop that question for this time,” he heard the man saying in a kind voice. “You’re strong enough in some ways, but not in others. It’s the bird that sings in the throat there that makes you easily touched. Did you know that the snakes charm the birds easier than any other thing?”

“The snakes—ugh!” and Mr. Edson shivered back into a realization that his horse was again walking through the laurel, and that the green-eyed monster with the earnest face was walking beside him. “What makes you speak of snakes like that? and will you have the indulgence to tell me what happened back there?—some jugglery.”

“I don’t know,” said the man, slowly; “one o’ the marks left on me to carry into this life, I reckon—it’s been called different names. Long ago, when people could lay their hands or their eyes on others an’ influence them for good, it was called the power o’ God, an’ the people who had it were called saints; an’ then when it was used for bad it was called the workings o’ the devil, an’ the people were burned for witches; an’ ye’ve heard tell of it, I reckon. I can’t explain—I don’t know how it comes; it’s the weight o’ justice, I reckon. I was a boy when they said it was the devil in me. I’ve grown to be a man, an’ they can’t say harm I’ve ever done, but they believe it’s the devil yet.”

“And back there?”

Don’s brows were wrinkled perplexedly trying to follow the slow statements and the queer sensations he had felt for a moment.

"Back there? oh, I was earnest, that was all—powerful earnest—an' I looked at you so an' clean forgot everything till I saw you get white. You see, sir," he added, pathetically apologetic, "this seems the corner o' the earth my life is made for, but sometimes I've been starved like for more larning out o' books, an' when I can ask anyone who has studied books, an' the world, may be, my tongue don't seem to belong to me any more—I just *have* to ask; an' that's why I was so earnest, a hoping some day I'll come across some man or some woman who feels as I do about God's plan and the justice in it; but I never have yet, an' a good many never give me the chance to ask them a second time."

"I can understand that, too," said Mr. Edson, with suspicious alacrity. He was beginning to recover something of his natural manner, but was not yet quite decided whether this advocate of reincarnation and dispenser of charms should be viewed in a comical or pathetic light. What a queer confession of faith! Religious doubts did not trouble Don enough for him to understand any sound mind becoming perplexed very deeply. His own interest in things theological had never led him far enough to reach doubt. But this other man—where had he ever gathered those ideas? Assuredly not through association with like minds. Don had a conviction that it was as well there were no like minds to keep him company.

They had reached a plateau in the wood where the trail branched into two; a stranger could scarcely have seen their faint tracing, but to the mountaineer the hills and the valleys were as the pages of one book, allowed to be within reach of his hands always.

"I'm on my way to the forge at the Ledge," he said, "an' if you're for a different trail we part here."

"But I am not; I'm going there myself, and then, I think, to Riker's."

The green-eyed monster—Don had already mentally invested him with that title—looked up at him, one curious, searching gaze, quickly withdrawn.

"An' you're bound for Indian Ledge too, to-day?" he said, slowly. "Well, I reckon there is room enough on the trail for us both." But for the rest of the way speech was gone from his tongue; the mood that had invited companionship of thought had departed. Something that he had forgotten or driven away for a space had settled like a cloud over the serious face, and he stalked on with bent head, answering only when spoken to. But once he spoke unasked, when his companion, for some awkward trick of horsemanship, gave vent to an opinion on his own restrictions in a mental sense when he was ushered into the world.

"You called yourself a fool, away across the ridge there, too," he stated, "an' you haven't any call to do that. You ain't a fool, but I don't reckon you know yet rightly what you are, or what it's in you to be; lots o' people go clear through life an' never find the best that might be in them, and they ain't fools, either."

"Thanks," murmured Mr. Edson, with the humility that was suspicious.

"It's got to come gradual, that kind o' knowledge," continued the other, ruminatively; "it's a gift some people are fenced jest out o' reach of all through this life—a longing for the knowledge and a guessing at its worth, but not let touch it. An' something tells me them same people have had larning and knowledge in some other life, an' abused it, may be, or threw it away, an' their punishment is to live now without it, but with the something inside always telling them, '*It belonged to you once, but not now; you threw away the thing you're a starving for, an' you're only getting justice.*' Yes, sir," he added, rousing himself as if to

take his companion into the confidences that had lowered to a soliloquy—"yes, sir, I reckon that law was made to stand, an' will fit every life that comes into this world. Justice makes us take our heaven or our hell, jest whichever we've earned, an' there ain't use in begging for mercy; natural laws don't change."

"There ain't use in begging for mercy!" Don felt himself half-whispering the words over to himself, they had been spoken with a resignation so touching, and so unconscious, and the intonation was so in keeping with the pathos in the great drooping figure; a load heavier than the visible one of carpenter-tools seemed laid on the broad shoulders.

"Poor devil!" thought the young fellow, commiseratingly; "I guess his brain must be touched through wanting education, and he has settled into the conviction that it is justice for past unknown offenses. What a weird idea to carry through life!—and daft as he is, how he starts speculation in a fellow's head with those queer ideas! I don't believe I care to cultivate such a deep thinker as a steady companion. He would upset the philosophical calm of the patriarchal life I intend leading up here."

The noon was far past when the forge at the foot of Indian Ledge was reached—a little sheltered cove in a wild gorge, where great trees dipped down from the heights, uprooted by storms, forming trestles of their dead bodies on which one could cross at places from wall to wall. Here and there rootlets had caught at the frowning face, fastening their fingers in the soil, and leaned far out to peep into the pools where the trout leaped. Clean-limbed birches and dark-shadowed pines clung there as living monuments of tenacity; and over the living and dead of the ledge the wild grape crept in great serpentine coils, and the deadly ivy reared aloft its flaunting head, and killed while it clothed

the thing it clung to; and far in the shadows, in the moist loam where the withered leaves hide, shone the great snowy stars of the Indian turnip, whose bloom was all gone in the more exposed places.

The place was all very quiet as they went along the path that at times crossed the tinkling stream, and again crept upward along the side of the dipping walls; even the birds did not sing down there in the depths, but they could be heard dimly up on the heights where the sun shone.

"This is the third time I've come up that gorge," remarked Don, turning in the saddle and looking back; "and I always feel a shivering sensation—the dampness and shadows, I suppose."

The other man raised his head and listened a moment to the carols high up that echoed above the cliffs.

"It's because you're meant for the warm and bright places," he said, simply; "some are born for that—just as the birds are."

"That sounds nice," agreed Mr. Edson; "but, my friend, don't dress me out in so many poetical fancies, or I won't know myself. I'll wager," he added, quizzically, "you could make rhymes and verses if you set your mind to it. You ought to—you see things with your mind instead of your eyes, and that's the way poets do; and they often see things crooked, and make up for it with a jingle. Your jingle about the birds is a pretty idea, but it doesn't quite hit the mark; you might as well have said a cat as a bird—they like the warm places too."

"I wasn't meaning a cat," answered the other tranquilly. "I said what I meant."

"No one at the forge, is there?" and the other subject was dropped as they rounded a curve that brought them to the great smoke-stained rock, jutting out its natural roof above the forge, where the coals were dead.

"Up at the house, may be;" and the sack of tools was dropped by the anvil. "Do you want to go up?"

"I think not," decided Mr. Edson; "that is, not if you are going, and will tell Le Fevre I'm here. I've never yet visited his castle on the heights there, and from the stories I've heard of his ferocious women folk, don't think I'll venture to-day. I'm fond of the gentle sex when they're gentle, but I don't care particularly for those of the ancient witchery order. No, I'll wait here; but you can take my horse, if it's far."

"Only over the ledge, and I'll walk."

Don dismounted, and finding a place where the sun penetrated in a great warm patch, he sat down and watched with amused perplexity the stalwart figure of the "monster" as he went up—up the course of the stream until a drooping pine hid him from sight. That is, he told himself he was amused, but he was not so sure of that as of the perplexity—the earnestness of the man in his strange fancies made laughter a hollow sort of an affair; and as he could not laugh, he consoled himself with whistling.

But had he been able to follow with his eyes the man whom he decided was a bit crazy, he would no doubt have given up the whistle, too, for just at the foot of the ledge, where the narrow path led almost straight up the surface of it, he had dropped down on a fallen log; his head leaned on his hands as it had leaned that evening on the store porch, when the dog had offered him sympathy.

"It is coming, sure," he said, low, but aloud, as if with the voice to reason some idea for the clearer comprehension of his brain; "sure, sure as justice. Ain't my load been heavy enough, I wonder? Did I ever make any soul suffer, and suffer as I have to do now? And all quiet, no one knowing, no one guessing; that makes it harder, sometimes. And then, again, what's the use? All the thinking won't help it.

I'm only wearin' my heart out with this fearin'; but their eyes told. She looked what I felt once—the time I saw a soul I felt I belonged to—that ought to belong to me. It's an awful thing to have to live a life through knowing that, and knowing that till the day you die that soul you belong to will never know you from the rest."

His breath came brokenly, convulsively, as if sobs were back of them, but the eyes were dry and staring down into the shadows below.

"It's an awful thing for one soul to jest live on the breath of another," he repeated; "jest trembling like on the edge o' life, like that pine-tree there that hangs over the ledge. It's grown on and on that way—it's an' old tree now—and it never once knew what it meant to be sure of the ground it grew in or to raise its head up high where the others are; and suppose it could think—and pine-trees do moan more than other trees. Is there a soul there too in prison? And if it can think or feel, how the storms must have made it ache an' tremble—ache an' tremble all these years an' years—aching away there in its heart, and tryin' not to let on, and whispering soft and kind to coax the birds down there; for it can't even hear their music if it moans. Moans and heart-aches scare the birds, jest as if they were human, I reckon. It's the hearts that are light and laugh that draw people to them; . . . and souls are the same—only our faces, and the bark of the tree, and the feathers of the bird hide them, that's all; and sometime will we all be alike again—sometime when the sin an' the ignorance o' the world is cured? I'm tryin' to think o' that time, I'm tryin' *hard*; . . . that's the only way I can lift myself up out o' this hell o' loneliness."

He arose after a little, stretching out his arms and throwing back his shoulders.

"But that's becace I'm turning coward," he said, and

threw back his head and looked up where the birch-leaves shimmered between where he stood and the blue vault above. "I don't know what you are," he said, darkly—"you who rules. I believe I'm a part of you, though, even if I do seem cursed; an' I'll get back there sometime, after this hell's over. I'm not asking help—they years I prayed taught me better. But when my heart gets sick, I've got to hear *words*, and so I just tell myself that it's the human part of me that turns coward, and begs for the happy ways that other folks live in; but all the time something in me says, 'It ain't for you,' so I've got to jest keep strong without any hope, and live the best I can under this sentence. . . . Did I ever make anyone suffer like this, I wonder? That thought always comes back to me, that and the thought that I must have abused book-larning sometime; an' the natural revenge is justice. . . . That settles it;" and he turned his steps stubbornly on the path again. "I jest had to take time to tell myself that what is to be is to be—what is is right—and it's only a coward who's afraid of justice. A coward, a coward"—and the words kept time with his feet as he climbed upward—"and a coward is a mighty mean thing; it don't dare to raise its eyes an' look life in the face. Is it for her I get to be a coward sometimes, or for my own self? I can't tell. Something inside makes me sick with dread ever since that day. She believes in the angels, though—may be that's the reason the singing made her—what use in my trying to see back of thoughts. I can go so far, and then comes the wall, and I'm out; and death is the gate, and only the souls who shirk working out their own salvation are the ones who try breaking the lock of it. I won't do that. I thought of it that time when I prayed; I've larned better. I'd only have to come back and live the life out,



and be that much farther away from her. No, I'll never do that."

He spoke aloud, but low, as lonely, isolated thinkers are apt to do, carrying a conviction of things to their own senses through the voice, that might not reach them through the silence; and he had talked away some of the strained, lost look that had been in his eyes when he halted at the foot of the cliff, and a stronger light of determination went up with him through the path that was flanked pink and green with the laurel. He stooped down and touched with his fingers the shining leaves. How often he had lain through boyhood and manhood under this mantle of the mountain, thinking over the teachings of wordy creeds, and finding himself so often wickedly at war with them; and when among the older people, how he would listen to discover if in any one speech there was given a hint of the troublous doubts that perplexed him! But there never was. Their oaths were proof of a most intense conviction of a personal God, who had the power to damn any soul at will—and the will of the God whom Moses gave them was so variable a thing as he read it, and the curses and blessings always were drifted to the wrong people; and though he tried and tried, he could read it in no other way. And then he would listen to the women folk, who sometimes discussed the texts of the preachers who came among them; but in all he saw a placid, pious faith. Sometimes they did not understand, but they never doubted because of that; they contented themselves with the idea that there were some things not to be revealed to every gaze, and their faith kept them in content—the preacher knew, if they did not!

And then he would go away more lonely than ever to the mountain, where the pine and the laurel whispered creeds not written in any books, and they brought to him the only

revelations he had known of beauty; and the moist earth would absorb the tears shed for his wickedness, and would bring to him the murmur, murmur, murmur of the innumerable lives that lived through it, and soothing promises of sympathy more real than ever reached him through people or their written laws. And the laurel had shadowed him, too, when those strays of memory had drifted to him in half-elusive fragments from a world of the past—a memory as of a vision of past woe, of past gladness, that awoke in him when the storms writhed down the mountain, or when the dawn with gold floods of light showered its sweetness over the valleys.

In a dim way he felt his soul was as the soul of the forest-growths, only it was yet in the husk, half-shrouded in the earth; its past summer but faintly guessed at, its summer to come not yet won.

And the husk in the earth must school itself to patience through the long winter; for only so will the seed within be granted life, and only so will the blossom be perfect in its season.

Thus had he come to conviction, after dark wanderings through the land of ignorance. The seed of the flower held a soul as his own body held one—each was an expression of God; one was to be a smile, perhaps, and the other a lesson, and each, to fulfill its mission, must work its own way to light through the mold; that was nature in all things, and so—justice. When he could reason out anything until it rested on justice, he was content for that time. Justice could not err.

And the whispers of the unchanging laurel he welcomed and drew close as kindred, although he had never heard of pantheism.

Going up through the summer sunshine, he touched the leaves just as he would touch the hand of a friend. They

were friends, for they held so many of his secrets—those laurels; and never once had they betrayed one.

And with the caress of their evergreen fingers he was conscious of a feeling that here, alone in the wild places, content always crept closest to him. Only when out among the faces of men did the discords begin; none felt as he felt; the psalm of their lives was in a different key. His was too high or too low; he could not tell which. Only at times had he felt drawn across the gulf that divided them—at times when human eyes had met his own, and in their unconscious depths he had read a bond from a life past—links that had once bound him; a bondage sweet, no doubt, but forfeited to some rule of that justice to which he bowed.

Other eyes besides sympathetic ones touched him and aroused those dreams—eyes from which he shrunk with a seemingly causeless antipathy, and his own would lower; and he would tell himself, "Sometime I did harm to that soul, or else it did harm to me; it forgets, and I can't remember clear, but it was so sometime. That's why I shiver when I hear the voice, or know when it comes close to me, even if I don't see it."

Something like that had come in his thoughts when he saw the dauntless eyes of this man who laughed and sung and won people's liking—not an antipathy, but a recognition of some power disastrous to content; and the bird triumphant calling from his throat seemed to this dreamer to be flinging out taunts of ridicule to the dark plodder who realized his own impotence against the gay witcheries back of the music.

So, as any man or woman of the mountain could testify, it was small wonder that, from calling him "silly" or possessed of the devil in his boyish days, they had drifted into calling him a pagan in his manhood. A preacher who long

ago had tried to reason with him had added the last term, and, as it seemed fitting, it stuck; and he felt the weight of it at times when among people, but it always dropped lightly off and tendered him recompense when among the laurels.

. . . . .  
A voice came to him over the warm breath of the noon—a high, shrill voice, raised above the snarl and yelp of dogs—all hidden from sight, however, by the thick growth of young brush. It broke in on the self-communion of the mountaineer, scattering dreams and retrospection back to their shadowy coves of the brain; and his face, seriously impassive, met the owner of the voice as he skirted the thicket and came abruptly on the cabin of logs.

She was not a prepossessing owner of anything, and she looked perfectly in keeping with the gaunt hounds and shaggy, fierce-eyed mongrels who leaped and struggled over each other at a log trough into which she had emptied a crock of buttermilk.

Her height must have been unusual in her youth, but the youth was long past, and the years had settled heavily—heavily on her shoulders, forcing them down and forward until the long head thrust itself out from under them like a turtle's; and the long staff she leaned on made her look something like the pictures of the witches in story-books. One would never have mistaken her for the venerable fairy of the same source—the eyes under the shaggy, white brows were too fierce, and the mouth, with its perpetual sneer, had in it too much cruelty; and her shrill laugh, as a shivering, frightened pup was caught in the teeth of a great mongrel and flung backward over the rest, was not good to hear.

“Did ye see that?” she demanded, as greeting. “An’ that’s the dog Dick swore he would shoot, an’ you swore

was no good. He's good enough to fight for his own, I'll be bound."

"I said you'd enough without him—more than you feed," answered the man, tersely; "I swore to nothing."

"Case yer such a d—d forsaken cuss ye've got not a thing to swear by," grinned the venerable lady, with a good deal of relish. "If ye'd right gumption, ye'd make that much use, anyway, of the heathen idol folks reckon ye've got hid som'ers on the mountain. I'd make it do to swear by—yes, sir!"

"Where's Dick?"

The old lady snarled at his unconcern of her sarcasm, and seated herself on the edge of the porch before deigning a reply.

"Dick's where every man ought to be," she answered; "at home."

"Whereabouts?" and his eyes flung glances of search over the little stumpy clearing back of the house. "I can't see him."

"Naw, nor you won't," stated the hospitable châtelaine, complacently; "Dick's in bed."

"Sick?"

The sneer on the satirical lips widened into a smile.

"Who ever saw him sick—my Dick?" she demanded; "he ain't one o' yer skim-milk, dauncy ones. He's as stout as a young bull, even if he isn't so big as all out-doors;" and she glanced vindictively at the stalwart figure of the man who stood there perfectly untouched by her slurs and evident antagonism. "Naw, he ain't ailin'—jest tired an' sleepy; out huntin'—huntin' 'coons last night."

"Don't lie, Granny," advised her visitor; "it isn't worth your while to lie to me, and you're old enough to know better. Folks don't hunt 'coons in June. You tell him

there's a man down at the forge to see him; and I want your brace and bit to take down to Riker's."

"Don't know where it is, and yeh can't get it," stated Granny, concisely.

"Yes you do, too, and he can," called a voice through the open door; and the luxurious Richard appeared, slipping his suspenders up over his shoulders as he came. "Who's the man?"

"Donald Edson."

"Old Donald?" queried Granny, with sudden interest.

"No; the other."

"What's he travelin' the road up this gorge for?" she demanded, peevishly. "Three times I've heard tell of him at the forge now; what's it for?"

"Horse-shoeing, and such," answered her grandson; "then he's got some right to this side of the hill, likely. They say the old man give him the papers for it."

An indistinct murmur from the old lady's lips suggested the consignment of said papers to a space under the earth where all papers or other combustible matter are supposed to be converted rapidly into smoke.

"Stop cussin'," advised the barefooted Adonis, as Dinah had dubbed him. "Where's my other boots?"

"Yeh don't need them other boots," was the retort. "What you want—" And then she interrupted herself with a chuckling laugh. "May be there's more visitors down the gorge?" she hazarded, with one eye blinking at the man in a knowing way that was diabolical. "A tony lady, may be, now—one o' the big-bugs, who would rayther look at a mountain boy that stands straight on his legs than all the pampered—"

"Shut up!" suggested her grandson, who had found the other boots, evidently the newest ones. "You talk too much, Granny."

"Is she down there?" persisted the dame to the older man, who stood waiting for the brace and bit.

"Who do you mean?"

"Ah, but yer innocent!" She nodded sagaciously. "In my young days no pretty woman would ride the mountain without every mountaineer knowin' who she rode to see; but you never did notice women, old or young—more fool you! An' this one's the slip that rides with young Edson, an' asked fer the picture of Dick; an' if ye knew the least o' women, ye'd know what that means. Is she down there now?"

"Granny, you know too much," remarked Dick, though not looking ill-pleased at this particular statement of knowledge, since it was in a way laudatory of his own attractions.

"No woman is down there. Am I to get that bit?"

"You are, you know. Granny, go and get it for him, wherever you have it stuck away;" and the lord of the manor flung back under the bed the "other" boots, and drew on instead the every-day ones, that were not quite so lengthy or picturesque.

The old lady moved meekly away in search of the required article, muttering as she went her disappointment that the girl wasn't there too.

"Jest so I could tell *her*," she added, in explanation. "It 'ud ta'nt her some, I reckon, though she is powerful independent sence she come across from Verginny this time; but that 'ud likely ta'nt her some."

"Where is she?" asked their visitor; and at the same moment another voice arose, asking for someone—a shrill, plaintive voice from the house, toward which the old lady turned with an expressive expletive.

"There it is again!" she announced, sourly. "Jest squall, squall this blessed day. When I had young ones, I didn't shove them on other people's hands to keer for; I—"

"No matter what ye did with yourn," decided Dick, briefly; "she can't trapse over the mountain after cattle an' pack that squaller at the same time. Go in an' 'tend to her."

She dutifully hobbled in; evidently she never had a thought of disobeying any command of her grandson, though at the door she did turn around with a vindictive sort of admiration in her face.

"You're slick, Dick Le Fevre, you are," she leered; "yer slicker than yer granny, far and away! Who was it cussed her fer all that was out, an' sent her after them strays, hey? An' now yeh ups an' chips in takin' her part jest 'case Bud's here. Lord! Bud knows yeh!"

Bud had pushed past her and lifted from the bed the wailing little creature whose life had measured but a little time in the world of the mountain. Its wails ceased as it felt itself lifted and petted in a silent fashion; and its venerable ancestress seated herself again on the door-step, well content so long as she did not need to trouble herself about it.

"This baby's hungry," said Bud, coming to the door. "How long has she been gone?"

"Hour or so," answered the father. "Give it to Granny, an' come on; she'll be back before long."

"If so be she finds them cattle," added the old lady; "you told her not to show her face till she did."

"Oh, I tell her a heap when the days are long," he answered, easily; "an' jest now I'm tellin' you to feed that young one an' keep it quiet—do you hear?"

And then, care free and omnipotent in his own domicile, Mr. Le Fevre lounged out across the yard toward the thicket. The man with the child in his arms stood silent, watching the old woman as she set a tin of milk on a few coals and began preparations that showed him she was



about to carry out the instructions received, and then he laid the baby on her lap.

"She'll be sick if she's let cry any more," he said, threateningly; "she's ailing some now, an' she ought to have her."

"Go along with ye! Yeh talk all the time like yeh was a granny yerself, Bud Lennard. I'll swear yeh ought to be a daddy, anyhow, fer the way yeh handle young ones."

He picked up the brace and bit, with no reply to this opinion, or the cackling laughter that followed him, and with quick strides he walked out and along the path the way he had come. A little way out he reached Le Fevre.

"Did you and him come together?" he asked, slightly interested, but not turning his head, as the other came up behind him.

"Yes."

"Thought I heard you say you didn't know him, jest the other day?"

No answer was returned to this, and the silence was broken after a little by Mr. Le Fevre adding:

"Say, have you noticed what a good man he is like to be? He looks soft an' pale, but he's got a grip, now; an' he's springy as a cat, an' good wind to back it. I saw him handling some hell-pets of horses up at 'The Notch,' an' he's got muscle, he has, yeh know!"

"So have I," said the voice back of him; and something in the sound of it made him turn quickly.

"Why, Bud—"

"I won't try gettin' at this question through your brain," said Bud, steadily, breaking in on Le Fevre's half-formed question, "because you haven't dragged yourself up yet to where justice an' reason mean anything to you; and I won't try gettin' at it through your feelin's, for you've drowned the best o' them in that new whisky o' yours, else you'd be

touched by that little baby that's ailin' back there. But you can still feel if a man hits you, I reckon; an' I'm tellin' you I'll break your neck if I hear again of you sendin' her away from the baby like that. You know I don't lie."

"I know yer meddlin' a heap!" retorted the other; "a body 'ud think yeh were close kin the way yeh go on. She's satisfied, I reckon, or she wouldn't a come back from over the line; jest let us alone, will yeh?"

"She come back on account o' the baby an' some idees she has o' duty—some idees you wouldn't understand—because she's a good girl," said the other, with scant respect for Mr. Le Fevre's worth; "an' you'll be sorry some day, Dick, if you treat her bad. You're only a boy, after all, an' a boy that don't take kind to teachin'; but you've got to do what's right by that girl, or I'll do as I said."

"What's it your business, anyway?" demanded Le Fevre, sullenly. "I can't keep a wife up like a lady, if that's what you want."

"Your wife is a lady—she's a good girl; she don't know half the wickedness she lives among. I wouldn't see a man abuse a horse, an' I won't see one abuse a woman or child, an' that's what it amounts to if you don't do yer duty by them; you're abusing the laws o' duty an' justice to the life you've brought into the world, an' the life ye promised to care for. Boy! boy! you don't know what you're throwing away!"

The "boy" looked a little embarrassed under the feeling in the man's voice; it stripped him of his aggressiveness and left him rather defenseless.

"But what's your call to—"

"Never mind what it is," was the quiet reply. "I don't intend to give it up. I'm going on down this trail to Riker's—don't feel like meetin' strangers again to-day, but you'll find him there at the forge; and, Dick, jest keep in yer mind what I told you—keep it in yer mind!"

## CHAPTER VI

## DAPHNE.

The warm wind of the west (Zephyrus the tender) was bearing back to the mountain mementos of the vanished sun. In the ferny, moist places of the forest arose the sweet breaths that welcome the dusk, that lover of the hidden places. A few belated robins were yet calling to each other, and in far-away valleys and the nearer highlands whip-poor-wills sung to the night.

The darkness had not yet fallen. It was one of the white nights, when that shadowed cloak is fastened upward with the stars; an evening when the dusk and the dawn blend their colors and woo the pink afterglow of the day into their wedding of tender tones. The pale yellow of the lady-slippers could yet be seen nodding in their regal columns, and azalia-bushes yet could thrust their pink crowns from the gathering grays. High up the leaves rustled and whispered in their odorous wind-bath, but down below quiet reigned in the sylvan places, and they stretched over the mountain for miles. And then, suddenly, on a vast wooded plateau on three sides of which the earth seemed to drop away, something crossed with sound the sweet good-nights of the robin, and the sweeter silences between.

At first it was the rustle, rustle of last year's leaves under swift feet, and then, coming closer, the tired, gasping breath of one who has run or walked long; and then a slight girlish figure crossed the dusk and hurried with startled eyes through the wood that looked pathless.

Every now and then she would halt slightly to listen. Her bonnet, tied by the strings about the round throat, hung down her back, and, bareheaded, she looked like some

nymph of the wild places in the half-light that was kind to the coarse shoes and the dress of many patches that was not just the garb for a goddess.

Surely that was something behind her that tramped, tramped and bore the bushes down like that! It sounded ominous, crashing as it did through dry sticks and twigs that crackled; and then her evident terror gained a tinge of amazement as she stopped short, listening, with wide eyes and beating heart, and straining her ears to catch again a sound she fancied had come to her. Was that a voice?

The certainty of it was strong enough to cause her to turn suddenly to her right and walk stealthily forward, with hands pressed over the tumultuous bosom whose throbbing drowned her own hearing.

But she could not walk far, however; and where she stopped a great crevice yawned deep down, losing itself in blackness. In some places fallen trees bridged it, and the many-armed giant laurel leaned over from either edge, touching fingers at times across the chasm; and it was from across the chasm that sounds had come—and the voice, it could be no one who knew the mountain that would wander there in the dark.

But—yes, it was the footfall of a horse striking a rocky surface that came to her ear now, a horse that had halted a moment; and again a voice spoke soothingly, encouragingly. She could hear it quite plainly now, and the footfalls continued; they were coming closer and closer. She could see the horse; there was a white star on his forehead. She could see the rider, whose head was bent peeringly forward as if to see ahead of the horse, but it was on the ground his eyes were bent as he brushed through the laurel that seemed growing thicker and thicker; it reared grotesque antlers high above his horse's head, and brushed whisperingly

past his own ears. He had just broken through what seemed a hedge of them, and reached again the creeping foliage of the huckleberries, when somewhere out of the dusk a voice that seemed quite close to him said, fearfully:

"You better stop right where you are, sir."

He stopped, accordingly, with a grim fancy of highway robbers crossing his mind. Had he not heard of a woman who once carried on such lone traffic on the mountain? But surely she had never made demands for lucre in those pleading, frightened tones! If she had, Don Edson most likely would have emptied his pockets for her. But he was much mystified as he halted and looked above and below and around, and could see only the wordless things of the forest—nothing from which the soft, vibrant voice could have come.

"Well, I've stopped," he remarked; "and if it is some disembodied spirit making the suggestion, I am waiting for the reason." And then straight ahead of him the laurel rustled and parted; two upraised arms shone in the dusk as they thrust aside and bent over the leafy curtain, and a young face, with shy, wide eyes, looked out from the shadows.

"It's me," she announced. "I was frightened when I saw you makin' for the edge like that. Didn't you see it?"

"See what?"

"If you get down off your horse an' come this way a few steps, you'll find out," was the answer, accompanied by a soft little laugh, nervous yet elated.

"Yes, I've found out;" and he arose from the edge of the crevice and looked across it into the eyes opposite. "A little more and my horse and I would have been down there. May I ask if you are the guardian angel of strays and idiots in this corner of the mountain?"

"No, I'm Krin," she said, soberly, drawing back a little. "I was huntin' our cattle."

"Krin, are you?" he asked, with the oddest feeling of unreality in the whole twilight picture. He kept his eyes on her face, not quite sure but that she would vanish if once away from his gaze. Had she not once before come to his aid in time of need, and looked at him with those serious, childish eyes, and helped him to a path he had been seeking vainly? And had she not straightway vanished that other time, and filled his days and nights with the haunting memory of her face and eyes? For he had not once been able to free himself from the pleading pathos in them. The odd feeling that had deterred him from asking questions about her came over him, bringing with it an unreal sort of atmosphere, and through it he heard himself say:

"And you are Krin? Do you know that for a moment I fancied you a ghost instead of a girl."

"I ain't a girl" she answered, in the same colorless, sober way, "and I must go on; it'll soon be late. If you want to get off that ledge, you'll have to ride most half a mile along it, till you get to the Neck; then cross over an' get on the old road. You can go wherever you want to on it."

"If I know enough," he added. "And you are not a girl? Then my instinct told me right. I knew you were some ghost of the woods! Krin, Krin! Is that another name for Daphne? That is who you are, I think—Daphne, who was changed into the laurel-bush; and you look all laurel but your face and eyes. If you should vanish now, I would be sure it was just Daphne who spoke to me out of the laurel."

"I don't know who you mean," she said. "It ain't anyone on the mountain, I reckon." Then she moved out from the circling arms of the bush and stood outlined in the straight, pale folds of her faded gown. "I cross the Neck, an' if you

ride along the edge I'll show you to the old road. Don't ride far back in the brush, though—there's another crack in the rock there that's worse than this ledge; it would let you down to the "den." And her voice dropped a tone lower, as if impressed with a great horror at the thought of what already lay in the "den."

"So I have been riding around and over that snake-den, have I?" he asked, eying dubiously the yawning break in the rock. "May be that's why my horse needed so much coaxing over this level; he had more wit than his rider."

"Some horses, and dogs too, know a heap," she agreed, in a soft, sedate way, as she moved along the chasm opposite him—"a heap about some things. They know quicker than people about snakes an'—an' ghosts an' such-like; they are scared of them."

"Are they?" he queried, smilingly. "Well, my horse is not at all afraid of you."

"He ain't any call to be;" and there was yet light enough for him to see her serious face, with no comprehension of his humor in it. "I never did hurt to anything—not willingly."

"I believe you," he said, with the strongest, oddest desire to reach across the chasm and touch just once the sloping shoulder that slipped away from the fair neck; just to cross that threatening depth and assure himself of the reality of the form moving through the dusk opposite him. His whimsical fancy was connecting her with a fair, unreal thing of legend that warns creatures of earth away from dangers, she glided so lightly and easily through the meshes of twining limbs and vines, like a slim bird, needing no trodden path; and if she would only speak loudly or brusquely once, he thought it might dispel the ghost-like fancies that persisted in coming to him. But she would not—the soft, rare tones had in them something akin to the

whisper of a brook and the murmur of some pines he had passed; and then he grimaced in derision of his own poetical similes, but nevertheless he told her of them.

"That so?" she said, turning the wide eyes in wonder on him. "I reckon not, though; you ain't used to hearing it, that's all. No, I've no voice. I never could sing; but I like it—I like it better than—than anything in the world."

"In the world," he repeated, dubiously. "I have not yet made up my mind whether you are of the world or not."

She smiled at that. "It ain't much of the world, may be, our mountain, an' one of your towns mayn't be much of it; but they all help to make it up, I reckon—one as much as the other."

"But I am not of the towns now," he objected. "I have given them up. I am going to claim a partnership in your mountain now, and may be try and steal its music, too. Will you bar me out? I think Daphne was selfish, if I remember; she wanted all the laurel herself."

"There ain't any can bar you out, I reckon," she answered, looking at him in a puzzled way—evidently the name of Daphne was an unsolved problem to her; "and as to the music, sir, you haven't need for any music of the mountain; you've got your own—an'—an' it helps folks more."

Her utter seriousness stilled the quizzical manner he had called to his aid with which to ridicule himself out of a seriousness that crept to him as he looked at her or listened to her. He had the most ridiculous impulse to ask if it was any sorrow he could assuage that left so pathetic a wistfulness in the wide eyes. They opened a trifle wider, and then dropped shyly, as he raised his hat, and forgetting, evidently, to replace it, rode on in the dusk bareheaded.

"I am not worth so great a compliment as that," he



said, after a long silence; "may be you will know that some day, little girl—some day when you know the world." But the smile he turned to her was not a gay one. "But what is it you mean when you say my music helps people more than the mountains?"

She looked at him, but dropped her head as well as her eyes this time, and hurried on. He had noticed how very fast she walked from the first, keeping even with his horse, though looking so tired.

"Can you not tell me?"

"I—I don't know," she said, uncertainly; "you ought to know. It's like when the preacher prays—an' you feel all at once how wicked you are—an'—an' how good you'd like to be if you could; only the singing—"

"Well?"

"It did more than that, someway," she said, breathlessly; for it is not easy to walk rapidly through clumps of wild growth in a forest and talk at the same time. "I know a woman—an old woman—who got religion once just at a prayer-meetin'; an' she told me that the man that prayed wasn't even a preacher, but the things he said meant more—'cause he'd seen a heap of trouble—meant more an' was more beautiful-like than she thought any human could ever talk, an'—an' so she felt it was the hand of the Good Man that was on him; an' it touched her heart, too, an' she saw what heaven might mean if people was only fit for it. And I—"

"Well—and you?"

His voice was soft as her own as he spoke. He was unspeakably impressed by the serious reverence with which she spoke of things sacred to her, and with ever and anon her face turned upward to him, as if with the certainty that he understood clearer than herself the divinity back of the prayers that help; and he—a flush of regret crept over

him in the dark at the thought of how little he deserved that belief from anyone. He had never appeared to himself quite such a graceless scamp as he did in the light of her simplicity. The fact that her words were slurred and uncouth did not touch him just then—all her provincialisms were covered by the way in which she looked at him, and the faith her manner expressed; and his tones were no longer quizzical as he said, questioningly, "And you?"

"I—well, I used to wonder a heap just what she meant. I'd study an' study about it—an' the religion—yes, sir, till that day you sung there at the funeral; then I knew when I heard you what it meant—the hand of the Good Man that touches people all at once. And I allowed," she added, simply, "if ever I saw you again, to tell you."

"Why?"

"I—don't know—hardly," she said, in a doubtful, troubled way; "only to just say 'Thank ye, sir,' 'cause ye helped me some."

"Good Lord!" he half-whispered; and then after a little he spoke aloud:

"I owe you the thanks, little girl. Just before I met you I was finding fault with my luck that lost me the path on the mountain, and all the time the Good Man was leading me right over the snake-den to hear things that are good for me; strange that you should happen to meet me just at the edge of that crevice."

"Bud—he says there ain't any things 'happen,'" she said, naively. "He says everything we do has some purpose back of it, even if we don't know it. I don't know; but he allows so."

"Bud? Who is it you call Bud?" he asked. The name was so much more childish than the acceptance of fatalism. "That is a name for a child or a girl, is it not?"

"It stands for 'brother,' I reckon; he's always had it, anyway—him, Bud Lennard. He's the best man I ever knew, sir—or," she added, "he would be if he had religion; but he hain't got it."

Her regret that he had not got it was very evident from the plaintive tone of the acknowledgment. They had reached now the "neck" of the point, as it was called—a bit of solid ground like an isthmus that joined to the mountain that great level that had shrunk, or been torn away, from the "mother" side, and left a gulf between them passable but at one place. The shadows were deep about it, for the pines grew there; and he looked about in astonishment as he noted them.

"I surely was here before!" he said to her. "I remember my horse did not want to pass that white stump."

"'Cause it stands where the rest of that rock-land is goin' to break away sometime, I reckon," she explained. "Yes, sir, you crossed there before or you wouldn't a been where I saw you."

"But I've been riding for an hour and a half straight ahead," he persisted.

"You've been ridin' in a circle straight around," said his Daphne, with a little smile at his wonder. "That's nothin', sir; folks do that generally when they're lost on the mountain. I don't know why they do, but they do."

She had halted a moment, leaning, panting and tired, against one of the pine-trees, as he rode across the "divide" and stopped beside her.

"I'll show ye the road in a minute, sir," she said; right above here is where ye strayed off it. Natural enough, too, 'cause the cattle an' hogs, they've got a path over the Neck; they go for the red-oak acorns over there in the winter. Yes, sir; but you can find the road now, I allow, 'cause this is the only plain trail that takes off between this

an' the township road, two miles up. I—I reckon that's where ye want to go?"

"That is where I started for from Riker's, but it has not been the 'short cut' they promised me; and now," he added, getting out of the saddle, "may I ask which way you are going?"

She drew back a little and looked up at him with something of hesitation in her manner. Did she not want him to know where she lived? Was she really a Daphne, who would disappear if once again she gained the shadows of the laurel?

"I go on the same road as you do," she said, after a little, "only the other way; and I must go, sir. It must be getting awful late," she breathed, fearfully. He looked at his watch by the light of a match.

"Twenty minutes past nine," he said, and wondered at the despairing little cry that broke from her.

"Oh! I must hurry. Good-bye, sir," she gasped, tremulously. "The moon will be up in a little, an' you can find the road then—or the horse will find it, anyway, if you let him guide you; an'—an' I do thank you, sir."

But as she turned to go she felt a detaining hand on her shoulder.

"You poor frightened child!" he said, compassionately, as he felt her trembling; "you look ready to drop. You must ride my horse home; yes, you must. I could never turn away and leave you here, tired as you are. If you are in such a hurry to get home, you will save time by letting me put you in the saddle at once," he added.

"Oh, I will, then," she agreed, hurriedly, "for I must hurry. I've been gone now so long; most all day. Yes, sir, I will, if you please."

He lifted her to the saddle, where she drooped in a limp, tired way that filled him with pity.

"She is a human creature, anyway," he reassured himself, as he found it was not entirely a thing spiritual he was placing in the saddle; "but what a slight blossom of a girl it is to be wandering alone over these hills; and I believe she is afraid, too."

"By the way, where are the cattle?" he asked, as they moved more quickly over the path, on which the moon was just beginning to scatter bits of light through the boughs."

"They've gone home through the little glade. I started them from the top, where I found them; but people can't go that way well."

"Are you not afraid to go so far alone over the mountain?"

"Yes, I am," she acknowledged. "It's awful lonesome sometimes; an' then when the winds blow down the hollows, an' you can hear them, like lots an' lots of people, talkin' and talkin' away off, like an army, that scares me some, 'cause I never know just what makes them so like. Bud, he says they're voices, but he can't ever just get me to understand whose; I wisht I could, but I can't."

"Bud must have a great deal of unusual knowledge," remarked Mr. Edson.

"He says—no," she answered—"he says that's what makes him heaps of trouble. I don't know. I think he knows a powerful lot, especially about the things that can't talk, the cattle an' such, an' snakes and wild things. Some folks is scared of him on 'count of that. But things he wants so bad to know is books, an' how to read them, an' all. I don't know what he wants them so for."

"Books are not so hard to get these days," said the man; "everybody can afford some learning."

"May be—I don't know; but he ain't young any more. Grown men can't go to school, I reckon, an' Bud, he was a grown-up man before he knowed what it was to want to

know things so bad; an' then he's always had folks to work for, first one, then another. An' he's been good to folks, Bud has—just as good as if he *had* religion."

He smiled at the way she divided people in the world—just into two classes, the ones who had religion and the others who had not. He supposed he would be assigned a place among the last when she knew him, and drop a little in her opinion besides, and he attempted a defense of those non-religious ones who yet tried to do good work.

She listened with undisguised wonder in the eyes he could see now plainly as the moonlight touched them.

"I reckon, now," she said, looking at him with a solemn sort of admiration in her face—"I reckon, sir, its just *your* religion as makes you so kindly spoken of them that haven't any. That's what folks call 'charity,' ain't it? An' 'charity' is what they make a heap o' 'count of in religion. I've heard the rider down home talk about that some."

He tried to answer her, but failed utterly. The sweet soberness with which she invested him with the attributes of a professed Christian put a weight on his tongue. He had, he felt sure, done or said nothing to lead her to that erroneous and rather exalted idea of his character; but it was such delicious incense, and so rare to him, that he longed to kiss the little work-worn hand on the bridle, because of her tender, primitive faith in things.

He had kissed so many hands, not work-worn, on a much slighter temptation; but he restricted himself to looking at this one, and showered mental maledictions on her family, or whoever it was that allowed her to labor until the impress of toil was left on her.

"Bud is a relation, I suppose?" he hazarded, to avoid those personal themes that made him feel so awkward. "I think he is the same man I met to-day in the timber and at Riker's."

"Likely. No, he ain't any kin to us folks, but he seems so. He's powerful kind to me sometimes," she added, simply; "just like he was my father, most;" and she rode on in silence for a little, as if in thought, and then: "It's all 'cause I'm some like a girl he liked once, I reckon," she went on, softly. "He owned up that much one day, when I asked him; but he never did tell me who she was. Granny, she says it ain't so, that Bud Lennard never had a girl; but I reckon it's so, an' she died, or something, may be. I think if she'd a lived he mightn't be troubled 'bout so many things, an' might a had religion, too. I'm always sorry for Bud."

He listened to the truthful confidence of her with the certainty that it was one of the strangest, most delightful evenings of his life. Were fauns and goddesses native to the mountain, he wondered, that he had met in the forest, on the same day, that massive, magnetic original of Lucifer's forces and this serious-lipped child, with her touching faith and sweet sympathy with all things of sacred tendency.

"Their avowed theories should take them wide as heaven and hell from each other," he thought, as he glanced at the rare, tender face, with the plaintiveness in it, and remembered the dark, moody-browed man of the morning; "and yet they are such close friends that everything she speaks of seems colored by his thought, and both, for all their provincial speech, are utterly unlike any other people I have met in the 'wooden' country."

The dusk and the moonlight so often traffic in witchery, weaving spells and binding souls a bit above earth; and this exile from the world felt vaguely their charm, blent as it was with the presence close to him that he found so unusual. The entire day had been that; the meeting with that green-eyed monster had sounded the keynote of conjecture to him that had been with him ever since, account-

ing in part for the absent-mindedness that let him stray from the old trail, and assuredly tinging his thoughts with the strange and peculiar, until the arising of Daphne from the laurel wrought no discord in his fancies. It was rather in keeping with the rare idyls the mountain could chant, if it chose. No thought of the commonplace world he had known had any connection with the fine suggestion that came to him from the morning, that touched him now through the night, and that had lain half-awake in him since the day by that open coffin. Was the mountain bewitched—or the people on it?

And so he walked by her side, listening to the low, caressing intonations, and vaguely conscious of how rare the night was. He felt as if waiting for some curtain of life to raise, disclosing a strange something which the things of the mountain suggested.

He had brought those broken bits of thought so close to himself that he did not notice their rapid approach to a wall of rock that rose abruptly before them until he heard her saying:

“And you just keep on that way and leave the ledge always to your right; an’ you can see now it’s moonlight.”

“But you are not stopping here?” he protested, as the horse, obeying the pressure on the bridle, had halted at the stony barrier.

She slipped quickly to the ground before he could get to her assistance.

“Yes, sir, please,” she said, hurriedly; “this is the nigh way to our place. It ain’t far now, an’ there’s a path up them rocks; but no horse can go. Thank you, sir. You’ve been powerful kind. Good-bye, sir.”

“Wait,” he said, as she turned, half-running, from him. “I will tie the horse here and go with you,” and he began to unfasten the hitching-strap; but she stopped him.



"Please, sir, don't!" and her voice was half-pleading. "I ain't scared to go now—no sir, indeed! An' it ain't far, either; an'—an'—"

"Don't you want me to go?"

She hesitated at that direct inquiry, and then: "No," she said, wistfully; "you'd better not, sir. We—my folks ain't what you're used to. I—I'd feel bad, may be. They hain't got any religion; and I—"

"Bless you, child," he said, holding out his hand, and really feeling as fatherly as the expression while he looked on her sad embarrassment, "I will not go, then; but won't you shake hands, Daphne? And don't be too hard in your thoughts on people who have not got religion yet. I've known some square sort of people who said they hadn't any."

She laid her hand in his, and he felt it tremulous, probably from that eager haste of hers to be gone!

"You mean men, I reckon, sir, an' that's some different, may be, sometimes; but women folks, they need it, specially when you're married an' have a baby, an' want to learn how to bring it up right, in the love o' the Lord, an' ain't just sure o' the right way. Yes, sir; then's when folks does need religion, bad—when ye've got children to think for."

And then Edson thought she added "Good-night," and that he answered her, but was too dazed to be certain of anything but that she was gone, fairly running up the path along the face of the rock, and vanishing over its crest, not turning even to glance back at the man standing there by the horse in the shadow and shine of the moonlight.

"Specially when you're married and have a baby," he repeated, in amused wonder. "Well, of all the perplexing experiences of this day, that young lady's final remarks are, I believe, the strangest."

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE DAY AFTER.

In the bright light of the next morning, the light that disillusioned so many, Mr. Edson awoke late, with a glimmering sense of being tired and wondering what had happened to him; and when he remembered, he proceeded to dress himself, to a musical accompaniment rather cheery.

"If those two were witch and warlock who abide in the timber, they let me get home safe, anyway," he confided to the image of himself in the glass, an image he had halted before and examined critically several times during his preparations for breakfast. Some idea of the reason for the careful study might be gleaned from a mental estimate that accompanied it.

"Good enough face; um! yes, that is to a careless observer. Are you a careless observer, Donald? You oughtn't to be this morning. You should try to find out what there is in your statuesque beauty that compels in the native mind—the abstract native—the idea that you are of religious tendencies. I can't say that you look the part. Your appearance indicates a good digestion, undisturbed by any weight of thought on any subject whatever, least of all the sort that promotes the bilious-hued doubts of the Pagan, or the ethereal pallor of Daphne. No, you look uncommonly well fed by the food of this world, my boy—so much of this world that I am puzzled—the—the blesseddest to account for your visions of yesterday in the timber; for of course you were tipsy on the east wind, Donald; and of course there was no monster of the green eyes there to mesmerize you at all, at all; and it was just some old witch of the hills whom you saw and imagined Daphne; and

may be the hint about religion and babies was all in your mind; and, summing it all up, you're in a bad way, Mr. Edson."

And then Mr. Edson descended to the lower regions, warbling plaintively, "I'm not myself at all."

"I should think not," remarked Miss Dinah, who espied him passing the sitting-room door on a quest for breakfast. "Considering the lazy lateness of the hour, and the probable depth of dissipation that kept you out all night, I have small wonder that you refuse to acknowledge yourself."

She was looking pretty enough, and provoking enough, to make many a man forget a breakfast, and Mr. Edson was by no means blind to the charm of the wine-brown eyes, or the very becoming array of pale pink that clung daintily about her—a fair rose of a woman alluring. Something so healthily sure of earth, he thought; and the very contrast suggested a pallid, starlit lily of the woods he had seen, even while he said, commendingly:

"How very pretty you look in that pink gown, Dinah! Your artist eye should tell you always to wear that color. Doesn't Aunt Lottie want to do you in water-colors this morning?"

"All a clever attempt to evade confession," decided the young lady. "Where did you wander to when you left here in a temper yesterday, you deserter? and why that musical refrain of a lost identity?"

"S-sh!" he whispered, theatrically, clutching her wrist and drawing her across to the dining-room. "Use your arts to secure me a substantial repast, of which I stand sorely in need, and I am your slave to command; all my sins will I confess, even to the devious wanderings of which you question."

"Nonsense! Don't be silly, Don; and do let go my wrist.

Serve you right if the cook refused you even a cup of coffee."

"Plead for me, won't you?"

"Why did you not stay for breakfast with that other girl?" she demanded; "for I know it wasn't a man that made you forget to come home. Wouldn't she give you any?"

"I do not believe she eats," answered Mr. Edson, debatably mysterious.

"Good gracious! then there *was* a girl!" ejaculated the prophetess, astonished at her own accuracy. "Come right in to the table and tell me all about it! Nettie, please get Mr. Edson a bit of breakfast and some coffee, will you? Yes, I know it is away past breakfast-hour; but you can charm that cook into sending him something nice, can't you? I thought so. Nettie, you are a treasure, and when I get married and want a housekeeper, I shall certainly hunt you up; shan't we, Don? Now there is your coffee; half the contract is filled; so tell me something about the other girl. Why does she not eat?"

"Do goddesses ever eat?" queried Mr. Edson, proving himself outside the circle celestial by the energy with which he attacked even the cold biscuit.

"A goddess! Um! This is serious, my child—a goddess in the wooden country. May I ask what particular part of the heavens this one dropped from?"

"She didn't drop," corrected Mr. Edson; "she rose up."

"Worse and worse! I thought you had quit cultivating *that* order. Has your deity of the lower world a name? and does she chew snuff? All the virgins I have encountered about here are addicted to that pulverized consolation. Is she an exception? Who is she?"

"Don't know so much of her as I would like to myself," he confessed; "only I'll swear she doesn't indulge in

snuff. She is a wisp of moonlight turned into a girl. Is that too poetical for a breakfast accompaniment? And as to who she is—what sort of a memory have you for mythological lore, Dinah? Who were the progenitors of that Daphne of the laurel episode? If you can tell me that, I can give you some definite history of the immediate family of my moonlight girl."

"What nonsense you are talking, Don Edson; you are just making this all up for my benefit. Daphne? Daphne? Oh, yes, that was the one Apollo loved; you will be imagining yourself Apollo next. Well, was she fleeing from the bull?"

"No," answered Mr. Edson, in perfect good faith, having forgotten the associated myth of Apollo's metamorphosis. "No, she wasn't; she had been hunting cattle on the mountain."

And something in the reply sent Miss Floyd into an immoderate fit of laughter, from which she answered, cynically, "That is what the latter-day Daphnes are all doing, my child; but tell me something more of her."

"I refuse," he said, pushing aside his empty cup. "I've earned my breakfast, and will be impaled no longer on the pin of your curiosity. I do not know anything about Daphne except her face and her voice; but there is a sort of fascination in ignorance sometimes, and I don't intend to try learning more. Can you comprehend that? No, I suppose not, as you are of the sex divine; but to average masculinity, the things one does not know about a woman are always so much more fascinating than the things one does. But you do not understand, nor would not believe it of me if you did, would you, Dinah?" And he arose, smiling down in a benign way at the pouting, disappointed face. "Is your father around this morning? Not going to leave

us before next week? That's good; I want him to help me out of a quandary."

And an hour later he emerged from Mr. Floyd's "den" bearing under his arm the fruit of a quest in the form of a thin cloth-bound book of a rusty color, which he carried to his room and bent over with engrossing eagerness; and the second bell had rung for lunch when he arose from it, with the quandary evidently erased from his mind. "Poor devil!" he muttered, commiseratingly, as he changed his coat and made himself beautiful to join the others; "and he so ignorant himself in all science that he could not explain away the thing they think diabolical. Poor devil! Well, may be I can help him clear his own mind regarding it, anyway."

Which soliloquy proved that the fascinating ignorance regarding his nymph was at least not filling the mind of Mr. Edson to the extinction of all else he had met or been impressed by through that ride on the witchy side of the mountain.

"And I am going to put up a saw-mill, and make use of some timber over on the 'wild land,' he announced, when the conversation turned, as it often did, to his plan of remaining there. "No, I am not afraid of losing myself again, Miss Dinah; and did I not tell you the mountain has a guardian angel who takes care of fools?"

"No, you did not," she responded, quickly; "that is a part of the story you forgot. Is it Daphne?"

But he only grimaced in answer, and began giving Mr. Floyd an account of probable location, natural advantages, etc., for his new enterprise.

"Somewhere along the edge of the glade, so that the hauling will be all down the mountain," he explained. "Oh, yes, I'll be a lumberman if I keep on; and I'm learning a little every day. There ought to be some decent houses

put up on that tract; and if I make a move toward it with the rough lumber, perhaps Uncle Don will open his pocket-book to help with improvements. I've got to convince him first, however, that I am not leading the life of a sybarite out here."

"Your Uncle Don will come out at once to dissuade you, if he finds you really adopting this wholesale manner of settling down," prophesied Miss Lottie, sagely; "and I really do not know what I should do without you in town next winter.

"Adopt Saxel," he suggested; and Dinah's eyes fairly sparkled with mischief as she saw Miss Lottie's cloak of coolness swiftly settling over the gentle little face. "Or Mr. March," added Don; and then the sparkling brown eyes were turned from her aunt for one quick upward glance at him.

"Mr. March is really a very nice person," agreed Miss Lottie. "I enjoyed his society very much, or could have if Dinah had only treated him a little nicer; she was always contrary with him; but pleasant as he was to me, you know, Don, he is not you."

"Lucky fellow!" agreed Donald. "He is just the style of a man I like, but have never flattered by imitation; the sort that has so definite an object in life that no counter attraction ever swerves him—neither love, nor marriage, nor the songs of sirens. Do you fancy he will ever get lazy long enough to think of matrimony, Dinah?"

"I have not asked him," she returned, with the daintiest flush of light creeping over her cheeks; "but I can after January 1st, if you are curious. It will be leap-year then."

"And he will have ample time to be wooed and married and all before that time. But how comes on that picture of yours, your blonde Adonis?—or is it a Vulcan of the Ligonier?"

"Oh, it is a Vulcan only sketched in. I am yet striving for the 'tone' of the composition. The moment I laid eyes on that forge, with its grim surroundings, I gave up all idea of a simple head. I must have something more comprehensive—a full figure, with the background of the smoked rock; a bit of fire gleaming from the cleft where the forge is, and the head of a horse thrust under the laurel at the entrance watching the blonde Vulcan making a shoe. How is that, eh? I have made three sketches—one that day we were there. When I decide just which one to use, I will go over with you again, and watch him at work. Just by accident, you know, a model will drop unconsciously sometimes into the very pose you have been hunting for."

"Yes;" and Don stroked thoughtfully the brown of a rather fine mustache, and looked across the easel at her, instead of at the stretch of canvas dotted with chalk-lines and meaningless hieroglyphics. "But see here, Dinah, have you stopped to think that these people are not used to being posed for studies, and do not in the least understand your altogether impersonal attitude toward them? You see you look on a model of the genus homo much as you would on a plaster cast, but—but—Aunt Lottie, why do you not convince her how much too pretty she is for her masculine models to reciprocate?"

"Auntie as a chaperone vanishes when art is in question," laughed Dinah; "but what has put those ideas in your mind? Are you afraid Vulcan will be impressed to his own injury? I guess not. He has a wife, you know, for protection; and I can't allow your scruples to interfere with my composition. What matters the opinion of these people? Thank heaven, they are not my judges."

"Well, I have spoken. I say no more; only if you speak to some of them for ten minutes in that gracious way you



can assume, you are likely to have some extra lovers, and I, perhaps, some duels to fight."

"Assume! As if I were never by any chance gracious naturally."

"Master the science of animal magnetism as explained in that book you got," advised Mr. Floyd, slyly, "then you can compel those erratic tendencies of hers to reason, whether she will or no."

"Animal magnetism! What new fad will you adopt next, Don? In the name of sense, why are you studying up questions of that sort?"

"Only a late desire to accumulate knowledge," he answered, airily, and retreated before the shower of questions Miss Dinah proceeded to launch at him.

"Don is actually getting 'queer' from living so much among those people on the other mountain," she complained. "Do you not think, Papa, it is time to write Donald Senior that the settling down he advocated has been followed up to a degree alarming? For if this state of mind continues, Don will settle so fast in the mire of the glades or the charms of the mountain that he never will go back to civilization. And is he really reading up questions of magnetism?"

"Oh, not very seriously, I guess; but something has aroused his interest in the so-called mystery of fascination, and I simply referred him to a work on animal magnetism in explanation; he wanted it for some friend, I fancy."

"He hasn't any reading friends about here except Mr. Winston. Now whom could he want it for?"

"Well, well, what matter? I do wish, Dinah, you would cultivate something besides the art of asking questions." And the old gentleman testily gathered up some papers he was trying to read and betook himself upstairs.

"So am I always excluded from the bosom of my family."

yawned Dinah. "Now Auntie, dear, you at least might say something nice to me, as a brace to keep me from falling asleep."

"Yes, to be sure," agreed Miss Lottie, rousing from the edge of a nap just long enough to say so. "This is a sleepy sort of a day." And Miss Dinah collapsed, and in a sort of despair picked up brushes and paints and went to work.

"But I vow I am going with Don in future on those reconstruction quests of his," she decided, recklessly. "He escapes the dull sameness of life in a country boarding-house, anyway."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### "I'M JEST KRIN—KRIN LE FEVRE."

But the days swung around for a week before the weather and the will of man made her vow possible, and even then it was the most prosaic of prospects—a ride around the road to the edge of the valley, where Riker lived.

"But I will go, even if I wade through clay and don't see a tree," she decided; "though I did hope you would go over the mountain."

"Some day I may, if you will wait."

"Which I will not. I will ride over all the ugly township roads in the district rather than stay in the house another day; and then I might get a look at Daphne. Does she live in this direction?"

"Can you imagine Daphne living on a township road?" he laughed.

He was growing elusive as Dinah herself those days; and the deprecating uncertainty with which he had com-

menced his settlement in the hills was giving way to an open-eyed confidence that was contagious.

"That young Edson's been sort o' layin' low around here till he got the lay o' the land, an' now he's peggin' into work an' raisin' hell on the mountain," was the grim summing up of his achievements by one of his tenants.

And the tenants took more kindly than at first to the innovations he was bringing in; a sort of awakened faith in himself was having its effect on them through some reflected light. They did not sneer so much at his white hands since they found the fingers could grip like steel, and through a revulsion of feeling that day at Riker's, they accorded him a place in their minds beside the minister, yet liked him better than that gentleman, simply because no restraint of duty to the cloth kept them sanctimonious in his presence.

Why they should assign him that semi-clerical character was a puzzle that met him first in the woods that night, but of which he had seen undeniable glimpses in the manner of the mountaineers ever since. All warmed toward him a little by that spark of sympathy that had touched him that morning, and that he had been able to express through the music. Such a subtle little thing to change a life! And Dinah, noting only the effects, and wholly ignorant of the cause, wondered a little, and watched him curiously, and decided that life on the mountain was making him queer.

"And is there never a Daphne in this part of the valley?" she queried. "Somewhere here it must have been that you found her. I am going to hunt her up, in order to have an object in life."

"You will not find her," he smiled, confidently. "Is not the home for Daphne in the laurel? And the laurel does not grow in plowed fields."

But, nevertheless, Miss Dinah kept her bright, cynical

eyes very wide open at every farm-house or cabin they passed until they turned from the "glade" road in toward the mountain, riding through the dense scrub-wood that had arisen in the track of some forest fire.

"If this is the road to Riker's, I wonder that Mr. Riker does not build a new one," she complained, as her horse went floundering in a sink-hole.

"Find fault with Mr. Riker's landlord," suggested Mr. Edson; "there would be more justice in that."

The dogs and children came bounding down the road when the horse Don rode was recognized by them. Their welcome was stripped of the shyness that had sent them into the chimney-corners that first day; to all appearances, their landlord's was a welcome, well-known face among them. But their feet tangled up in each other a little, and their eyes grew shy again as startled partridges, when another horse followed the star-faced one, and they saw that its rider was a lady. But the graciousness of which Mr. Edson had made comment would not long allow Miss Dinah to be a stranger when she set her mind on being an intimate; and as she made herself flatteringly at home when once inside the door of the cabin, and got up an admiration for the new mongrel pups equal to her enthusiasm over the way the baby "took notice," the young olive-branches of the House of Riker leaned to her amazingly.

"But we're all upside down here," apologized Becky Ann, as she brushed off a chair for her visitor, and with a few final whisks of a broom finished the general house-cleaning that had commenced at sight of the new arrivals. "A neighbor of ours—they've had some sickness lately, an' I've been up there some, an' my own house has jest been left for the children to look after; an' you know what children are!"

Miss Dinah did, and expressed her knowledge in a sym-

pathetic, long-suffering tone that would suggest an idea of a kindergarten somewhere of which she had sole charge.

"Not but what some o' them is a great gift," added Becky Ann, reaching furtively for the corner of her apron, and like the rest of human nature counting her best things of life among the things that were lost. "There was my girl Addyliny—my oldest, she was—and a powerful help. I reckon you heard about her; died the first of the month."

"Yes; Mr. Edson told us. He was at the funeral, you know."

"I should say we did know," assented Becky Ann, with a wan sort of enthusiasm driving back the sudden memories of loss. "My-oh-my! yes; if anyone had said to me, 'Mis' Riker, your mournin' ain't so deep but what human words can light it up for ye,' I wouldn't a believed it—no, sir!—not if they had swore it. But, my-oh-my! when he stood up there an' read them hymns (an' none o' the mountain folks knowed he was serious-minded before that); an' all o' them kind o' wondered at the preacher askin' *him* to do it, ye know—him, a stranger like! But when he sung they didn't wonder then; an' I wasn't the only one he started cryin'. He does sing beautiful an' comfortin'-like, don't he?"

"Yes; to be sure," agreed her visitor, rather vaguely. Don in the rôle of religious vender of comfort in affliction was so new to her that she would have laughed if it had not been for the earnestness in the woman's voice, and a moisture in her eyes that was a trifle contagious. "Yes, he has a fine voice."

"I don't know as it's all the voice," debated Becky Ann. "I ain't a jedge o' fine music; but a neighbor o' ours, Bud Lennard—he's queer, but he knows some things—an' he says it ain't all jest the voice, the instrument like. He says

it's something or other that's fine in the soul back of it. That's the way he said it; but he's queer."

"I should say he was," agreed her visitor; "and I did not know Mr. Edson's singing had made such a sensation."

"My-oh-my! yes—we thought a sight o' that; there never was a funeral about here had such singin' as our Addy's had. Some o' the folks here—Methodis'—they said that sort o' singin' hymns brought the Spirit o' the Lord down; an' Mis' Le Fevre—she 'lows she most got religion from it."

"Did she?" asked Dinah, with her gaze directed to Mr. Edson, who, astride of a log down in the clearing, was talking with Mr. Riker, and looking too entirely careless to fit the priestly garb of mentality that was so gratuitously assigned him—"that was strange."

"Yes, sort of; and then not so very much, after all, if yeh only knowed her. She's been honin' for religion this good while. Some o' her folks who raised her was religious, I understand. They're dead now; and she was just livin' round when Dick Le Fevre, he married her."

"Le Fevre?" said Dinah, catching at the first thing that offered to break in on this bit of religious retrospection and biographical outline—"oh, yes, I know him."

"Do yeh?—well, then, yeh know how much she'd be took aback at expectin' to find him or his granny religious like her folks was—my-oh-my!—yes. He's about the worst pest this mountain has, in some ways; 'an old Granny!—well"—with a furtive glance about and a lowered voice—"it jest isn't safe, folks say, to speak things o' her, even if she don't *seem* to be around—there ain't any tellin' *what* might hear yeh!" And then Mrs. Riker looked significantly at Miss Floyd, and Miss Floyd's eyes opened in understanding; there was a slight bit of pantomime,

directed toward the children at the door, and then a whispered query was put.

"A witch?"

The mistress of the house nodded, and at once herself and visitor were on a more sympathetic plane than they had reached heretofore.

"Good gracious! Tell me all about her. What does she do?"

"Most all the workin's o' the devil in reach of her—so folks say. She's an awful woman!"

"Well, her son does not seem altogether satanic. He can be very civil."

"You're right he can—as smooth-spoken as yeh'd want to meet. That's the way he got that poor child to take up with him, I reckon. She wasn't raised in these parts, an' so didn't know him much, and wasn't scarce growed up when he brought her home. Poor soul! I do feel sorry for her, many's the time—though she never says a word."

"Not even about the witchcraft?"

"We don't reckon she knows it. She never sees a woman on the mountain, 'less it's me. No one will go nigh Granny, so she never gits to see folks or hear things. She did mourn a heap 'cause she couldn't go to meetin' down the valley—poor thing, she jest hadn't clothes fit; and then last fall she did set to work pickin' chestnuts, bound she was to have a decent dress and bonnet—picked nigh two bushel, she did—and jest when she wasn't fit to be out doin' any sort o' work, neither; an' then d' ye think they'd even take them to the store for her? Well, they wouldn't—they were uncommon mean with her jest about that time; but Will, my man, he heard of it through Granny ta'ntin' her, an' he up with the sack o' chestnuts an' toted them down here, an' Bud, he took them to town and got a dress and shoes an' a lot o' things—got more out o' them chest-

nuts than there was in them, I reckon, for Bud is mighty good-hearted to folks in trouble. An' when she got the things she jest up an' leaves Dick, an' goes across the line again to some o' the folks she'd lived with; but she was too delicate to do work, an' I reckon she didn't get as much a welcome as a strong woman would. An' when her little girl was born, an' Dick heard tell of it, he jest went over an' coaxed her back, and here she's been all summer; an' hard time as she has with them two, I don't wonder she wants religion so mighty bad, if there is any comfort in it; but I think she'd get more comfort out o' life if she didn't worry over it so much."

"A very natural supposition," agreed Miss Floyd, with a slight shadow of boredom on her face, as she wondered if Don was going to talk all morning about that rail-splitting, and if the religious Mrs. Le Fevre was a standard topic of conversation at the Riker homestead. She had already pictured Mrs. Le Fevre in her mind—a severe-looking martyr, sanctimonious and illiterate. She jumped to the conclusion that the blonde Vulcan was perhaps excusable for the recklessness and shady character assigned him. It was enough to drive a man to drink—and a man's grandmother as well—to have a female like that to share one's bed and board; and to think of Don Edson influencing the religious tendencies of such an individual—that was the very funniest thing she had heard for a long time. She would have something to tease him about besides the visionary Daphne.

"I must surely write to him about it," she decided, mentally. "'Anything strange or peculiar,' was what he asked me to jot down, if I came across it; and I should think that Don in the character of a revivalist will be about the strangest, most peculiar thing likely to happen."

And the familiar manner in which she used the pronoun



masculine in her soliloquy showed that Miss Dinah was none too wise to think of someone so frequently that the personality of the individual had supplanted his own name.

"You must be very far away from all neighbors here," she remarked, glancing up along the slope of green, where the unbroken wood circled the mountain for miles. "It is a lonely place for anyone to live who is timid; but I suppose you are not."

"Well, I don't know," nodded Becky Ann, in a sideling fashion difficult to translate. "I ain't so brash in the timber as I'd like to be, sometimes, specially if Will happens to be away late, an' I have to stay alone here with the children; but, my-oh-my! if you think this here's lonesome, what 'ud you think o' Granny Le Fevre's place up at the Ledge? That's just the wildest, snakiest—my-oh-my! there she is this minute."

Thinking to see the storied witch, Dinah leaned forward to the window; but only a flitting shadow touched the sward an instant and vanished from her range of vision, and then there were quick steps on the little porch, some shouts of familiar welcome from the children, and then the most impossible witch stood in the door-way, and halted speechless at sight of a stranger.

"Come right in, Corinny," commanded Becky Ann, hospitably. "This here's Miss Floyd, from up at the Notch house. Miss Floyd, this is Mis' Le Fevre. An' you look ready to drop," she decided, with a quick change from mistress of ceremonies to the personal appearance of the newcomer. "Set down in that chair an' tell me what's wrong. Is Edie worse?"

"Yes, she is," she answered, and slipped down into the chair, holding her side and breathing very fast; "and I run all the way. You said—your Will would go for—a doctor."

"My-oh-my! To be sure. But our mare hurt herself on

the foot this morning; he's just been dosin' it, an' I know she ain't fit to go; but he'll walk it. Where's Dick?"

"Dick, he's down at the settlement somewheres. I surely counted on seeing him home this morning, but he ain't;" and the plaintive voice had an added tone of hopelessness in it as she made the statement. "Bud's started after him, but I jest couldn't wait a minute longer."

"Well, you jest take your breath, an' I'll call Will. Will! 'hoy, Will!"

"Must you send far for a doctor here?" asked Dinah, who was taking mental notes of the delicious coloring in the wild-flower face, and the fine modeling of the throat, around which the strings of a huge bonnet were tied. Altogether, she found her charming and unusual—this pathetic-eyed creature, who lived with a witch, if she was not the witch herself.

"Most ten mile—it is from our house," she said; and the voice, with its slight sing-song cadence, seemed just the one to accord with her general personality. What a soft-voiced witch! "Ten mile to a regular doctor. There's some herb-doctors about. Bud's one, but he don't dose babies much. Granny has an herb-cure; but I'm jest anxious for a regular."

"Ten miles!—that is a long walk. Oh! I tell you what we can do. Mr. Edson is here on horseback; he would go as we go home. I'm sure he would, when it is a case of sickness."

"May be he would!" and a bit of hope crept into the wide, childlike eyes. "I know he's powerful kind to folks mostly, powerful kind."

"Is he?" queried Dinah, smiling. "Well, I don't know. He has an average amount of the milk of human kindness—enough, at least, to bring a doctor for a sick child; but I did not know he was getting a reputation on the mountain for his virtues."

The bonnet was pushed back a little farther, with a wandering, uncertain movement of the slight brown hand. The humorous tone of Miss Dinah's remarks evidently disturbed her; she did not look like a person who understood humor, anyway.

"He's kind, though," she reiterated, with soft insistence, "and good. He's a comfort to folks, specially when he sings."

Dinah's alert brown eyes glanced at her curiously, as if to judge the mental status of the pretty study that looked so like a human anemone. She was earnest, at least, to judge by the sincere belief expressed in her whole face.

"Oh, you know him well, then, and have heard him sing?"

"Yes, I heard him sing once, an' I talked to him once, more than a week gone now; just the night my Edie took ailin' first, an' that was a Friday—a whole week I've been settin' up with her now."

And she looked it, drooping there in such a weary fashion, an uncertainty in her expression and gesture that was either embarrassment before this well-dressed lady of the cities, or else anxiety to be gone again.

But the attention of the well-dressed lady was turned for an instant from the sweet form that was not well dressed to that last statement of the one time on which she had spoken with Mr. Edson. Friday night! Surely that was the night he would not tell her nearly enough of; and now she could find out, at least, the direction of Daphne's den, and to confront him with the withheld knowledge was a temptation strong enough to make her inquisitive.

"Friday night? Are you sure that was the time?" she asked. "I think that was the evening he lost his way on the mountain."

"So it was. That's how we met. I was driving our

cows home, an' it was powerful late to get lost in the wood—most moonrise."

"And—and there was no one with you?"

"No, ma'am; there ain't anyone at our house only Granny an' Dick, an' they—they couldn't go that day."

"Then it was you who showed him the way from that terrible ledge—you who—whom he called Daphne?"

The funniness of the situation struck Dinah as she saw through the window Don approaching the house with Will and Becky Ann. She dropped her riding-whip, and stooped for it, with the least dangerous of coughs—the sort that smothers laughter; but the woman of the mountain did not see the subterfuge.

"He did say that name," she acknowledged, with simple unconcern; "but he made some mistake, for it ain't mine. I'm just Krin—Krin Le Fevre."

And as Mr. Edson crossed the threshold, Miss Floyd glided past him with so curious an expression on her face that he turned to glance after her. She had halted by a flock of little chickens that the children were feeding, and with slight regard for her riding-habit, had seated herself on the barrel that served as a coop, and was laughing silently.

He halted long enough for but one questioning glance at her—one her eyes met and refused to answer—and then, just a little ahead of the Rikers, he went in to see the woman waiting there.

She arose, in an embarrassed way; the bonnet had drooped over her face again, but the delicately modeled chin Dinah had admired arrested his eyes with a strange gleam of remembrance—and the slight, shrinking form draped in the slimsy, faded calico.

"I am sorry, madam," he began; and then the chin was raised a little, and the heavy bonnet slid back, and recog-

nition checked the commenced speech. "It is you—Daphne?" he said, putting out his hand, and her own touched it for a moment.

"Yes, sir," she answered, in the shy but corrective tone he remembered; "but I ain't Daphne—I just was telling your lady so. I'm Krin—Krin Le Fevre."

"Oh!"—and then he paused, awkwardly, as Mrs. Riker entered—"Le Fevre! Then it is your brother's child you want a doctor for?"

"My-oh-my!—no," broke in his hostess. "This is Mis' Le Fevre herself, Mr. Edson. I allowed you knowed her, or I'd a made you acquainted first off. This is Mis' Dick Le Fevre."

"Oh!" he reiterated, apologetically, conscious that he was staring at her, and with a growing consciousness of Dinah's reason for laughter—"and then the child—"

"It's my baby, sir," said Krin, with a sad sort of pride. "Yeh know I spoke about her that time I was after our cattle. Well, she's been ailin' ever since that day; and now I'm set on a doctor lookin' at her. She was powerful bad last night."

And all his erratic, impulsive heart went out to the trembling red mouth and the unconscious wistfulness of the eyes. The discord of Dinah's laughter vanished in the fine air of this childlike mother's earnestness.

"You shall have a doctor as soon as I can get one here," he said, promptly; "so don't worry." Then he walked straight out to Dinah's throne on the chicken-coop.

"Come! I shall have to hurry you back home," he said, taking her arm. "I am going for the doctor, instead of Riker." Then, as he saw the quizzical light in her eyes: "Yes, I am going for the doctor for Daphne's baby, and if you think that funny, just have your laugh out and be done with it; but please don't let that poor creature see that she is an

object of amusement. If you could only forget entirely the groundless nonsense we talked of her, I would take it as a favor; but I suppose that is too much to ask?"

"Yes," agreed Miss Floyd, when they had parted from the others and were riding out over the "glade" road—"yes, I am afraid it is, my memory is so good; and this affair is really unique. I was just hearing the loveliest, most improbably virtuous things of you this morning, and then, like a plunge into an ice-bath, I stumbled on the fact that your trysts in the wood with an imaginary Daphne are really kept with a most interesting mother of a family. Oh, Don! Don!"

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## CHAPTER IX.

### LAW AT LE FEVRE'S.

Through the shifting mists of the mountain waving to and fro in the night-wind, two figures loomed up vaguely—moving bulks of darkness, crossing now and then the stationary darkness of the trees; two men, whose heavy breathing told of a long or rapid walk in the warm night. At last one of them, with an impatient expletive, dropped down on a log that offered a seat and hid its remaining length in the shadows.

"I'm beat out," he acknowledged; "and I ain't a going to keep up this sort of canter the whole trip. What the devil you made up of, Bud? I hain't never seen you tired once."

"She wants you home," reminded the deeper, mellower voice; "we haven't time to rest here."

"She always is wantin' something," was the peevish answer; "and she's too darned skeery 'bout Edie. She

always is in a stew if the young one's ailin' a bit; an' all young ones have their ailin's, mostly."

"I reckon. Come on."

"Go along; I'll ketch up."

"You'll come now;" and the tired pedestrian arose good-naturedly at the command in the tone.

"All right, if yeh don't walk so infernal fast. How'd yeh happen to find me?"

"Ike Dumphey said he'd seen you at the settlement. Then I heard them tell of your trouble at the coal-works; so I tracked you. That man you cut will make you trouble."

"Naw; I allow not," was the complacent reply. "Settlement folks ain't over-anxious to follow up into the mountain; there's too many places to get lost."

"Revenue men, may be, won't be so scared."

Mr. Le Fevre, for it was he, halted as if at the challenge of a sentry.

"What you drivin' at?" he demanded.

"You needn't try to pretend with me, Dick," said the other, gravely; "and don't act lies—it'll be the worse for you some day. You've been trading liquor down there at the settlement, but it's been made up here on the mountain. You're making a road for trouble to walk over; and that man you quarreled with has spread the word he'll inform on you, and do it right away."

"Damn him!" said Mr. Le Fevre, fervently. "That's the way with the cursed settlement folks; first thing they turn to is to tattle if you do them any hurt. Well, I guess they ain't on our tracks yet, anyway;" and he checked his steps a moment. "No, I don't hear any hosses;" and he laughed at the idea of horses following, for they were on a short cut over ledges where no horse could walk.

"That proves no safety; they'd take the road for it."

"And get there ahead of us," suggested the suspected moonshiner, jocularly, evidently with little idea of any "settlement" folks venturing into the night of the mountain. "I reckon you'd fight with me, Bud?"

"No, I think not," was the unhesitating response. "I wouldn't let you get hurt if I could help it, but I'd try just as much to keep you from doing hurt to any other man."

"You're a hell of a friend!" decided Mr. Le Fevre, ironically.

"I never said I was your friend," answered the man ahead, unconcernedly. "If you want friends—the right sort—you've got to live different."

"What's the matter with your livin', an' how many friends you got?" And with this retort silence fell over their path; and without further words the crown of the last hill was reached, one of the downward steps of the mountain, and deep into its bosom cut the gulch of Indian Ledge.

The deep bellows of the curs and half-hounds gave warning of their coming, and the light from within streamed through the quickly opened door, outlining as it did so two horses tied to an apple-tree near the door.

"Strangers!" whispered Dick, stepping back into the shadow. "*You're* never in danger; go in."

But the other stepped to the heads of the horses.

"It's Mr. Edson's horse, and I think Dr. Nesbit's; you had better come in."

"Who is there?" demanded the shrill voice of Granny in the door-way. "You, Dick! that you?"

"Yes, I found him;" and Bud walked past her into the house and to the bed in the corner, where the young mother bent over a tiny form.

"Better?" he said, laying his hand on her shoulder for an instant; and she turned a radiant face up to him.



"Yes, yes," she breathed; "she is just asleep now. Mr. Edson, he brought the doctor — oh, Bud!"

For at the touch of his well-known sympathetic hand the self-control that had been kept before the strangers melted away in a burst of glad tears, and leaning her head on the pillow, she cried quietly; and with a long, curious look at her, he turned away, attempting no word of comfort. She did not raise her head when her husband entered. His maternal relative had given him the news before he came in, for he asked no questions, only remarked, "I reckoned you was more scared about her than was needed." But he thanked Don for taking a twenty-mile ride on their account, and confessed to being infernally hungry, suggesting that the strangers would wait and have supper with him; an invitation that was declined, as the physician had already agreed to spend the night with Mr. Edson, and they had only waited to see the effect of certain medicines before leaving.

Each spoke what kindly, hopeful words they could to Krin, and bidding good-night to the others, started for their horses. Granny paid no attention to them whatever; the mere presence of a "regular" vender of cures was a slight on her own medical knowledge, and their visit had not been a social success. She was trying, in a tone but slightly modulated, to impress the Pagan with her own opinion of (condemned) quacks; but he, after a brief recognition of Don, had sat silent, leaning his head on his hand, looking, as they thought, too utterly tired for notice of the surroundings.

But he was not too oblivious to follow them to the door, stopping Don with a gesture, and holding out his hand.

"You sent me a thing that takes half the weight of a curse off my mind," he said, in a halting, labored sort of way, as one does a difficult thing under compulsion. "I never

shook hands with you, but you've helped take a load off another mind here this night; and if your willing—"

The proffered hand finished the sentence, and the younger man clasped it with frank earnestness.

"You mean the book?" he said, with a smile. "That's all right; glad I happened on it. Don't be so quick shouldering curses till you know what they're intended for after this; you're equal to Moses himself in hustling around for them;" and with this half-laughing reference to their former conversation, he turned again to follow the doctor, who seemed to realize more keenly than the young landlord that he was in a disreputable corner of the world, and had no idea of lingering.

The innumerable canines had again commenced to make night musical, barking ferociously, and Grandam Le Fevre pricked up her ears alertly at a peculiar tone from one of her force of watchmen.

"Strangers about," she said, with keen laconicism, pausing on her way to the table with a plate of bread and meat for the use of her grandson.

"You're late makin' the discovery," was the ironical response of that worthy. "They're jest leavin'."

"'Tain't them; it's new ones. Yes, 'tis—hark to Bach!"

Without a word, Dick reached for his gun, and from the table drawer thrust a box of cartridges into his pocket. Bud's eyes had evidently been keen as the old lady's ears, for he turned suddenly and laid his hand on the gun.

"No use to fight against the law, ef it is the law," he said, warningly; "it's like to be bad for you in the end, Dick. Take care!"

At the same instant the light gleamed on something in the hand of a figure that rose up from the corner of the pig-pen.

"Hi, you! there in the door, stop jest where you are!"

rang out a voice weighted with the bullying quality of brief authority. "I've got you, Le Fevre, in the name of the law!"

"The deuce you have!" retorted the figure in the door, halting not at all; and Krin, startled by the call, raised her head in time to see the flash of red light that cut the darkness, and then, without a cry or sound, Don sunk in a lifeless-looking heap. There was a shatter of glass as a sash was wrenched from the window-casing by Bud Lennard, and then with quick strides he reached the limp form and raised it in his arms as if it was a child's, checking the rush of the legal agents who materialized from the darkness.

"I'll kill the first man that fires another shot in that house," he said, slowly; "two women an' a sick child is in there, an' there ain't anyone else. Yqu've shot Mr. Edson, gentlemen, a man as come here to help the sick. An' Mr. Le Fevre ain't here jest now; he's gone."

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE CLOUD ON THE MOUNTAIN.

And gone he was; over the hills and far away. Days went by, and he was still gone; and Don, whose form had been mistaken by the sheriff for that of the mountaineer, had a grim sort of satisfaction in knowing that the young renegade had eluded them.

"That bullet with which the sheriff grazed my skull has enlisted my sympathy with the law-breakers," he acknowledged; "and then it gives me the comforting thought that I am of practical use on my estate."

"Stopping bullets for other men; practical enough,

indeed!" agreed Dinah. "The only redeeming feature of your foolhardiness is that it saved me my model."

"But if he is not to be found?"

"He must be; the Vulcan is not finished."

"Stupendous reason; of course more important to the man than his freedom—may be life, if that other man should die."

"You are talking too much," decided Miss Lottie, who was in her element with someone to nurse. "You know coolness and quiet are the things ordered for you."

"But I am not sick," he protested. "My head aches still, when the sun gets hottest, but it is only a scratch."

"Your uncle thinks it serious enough to hasten your return," smiled the little lady.

"Has he repented the order of banishment? Has he acknowledged his faults and asked to be forgiven?" asked Dinah, eagerly. "Tell us all he says."

"I—I can't very well do that," protested Miss Lottie. "He might prefer expressing himself to Don personally."

"Um!" and Dinah looked wondrous wise. "My own opinion, Donald, is that there are hidden things in those letters that are growing more and more frequent between your uncle and my aunt; they mean mischief somehow."

"I can't imagine her letters meaning mischief to anyone," and Don's glance at Miss Lottie was lover-like; "in fact, it would be a jolly good thing for him to always have letters from such a source. Why, when you used to write to me, I could pilot him out of the worst of tempers by reading one of your letters to him. Yes, indeed, whatever politics may say, Uncle Donald never changes his opinion as to the first lady in the land."

"You are extravagant," she answered, with a blush like a girl; "but he was always very faithful to old friends. Why, when your fathers were both boys, and we lived not

far apart, it was really hard to tell which of the houses ~~we~~ children belonged in. Yes, we were always great friends."

"And Papa and he are getting all the good out of that friendship just now, you may depend on it," said Dinah. "How lucky Papa did not leave before your adventure; he can give the senior the affair in detail. Wish I had gone along; I could have furnished the embellishments."

"Without a doubt," agreed Mr. Edson; "and to my complete discomfiture."

"Don't you believe it, Don;" and Miss Lottie smiled on them both knowingly. "Dinah says all her ugly things to you, but of you—no—I never hear them any more."

Dinah's face flushed as though caught in some misdemeanor.

"Well, considering that he is not to be disturbed by speech or sun or thought, it seems to me, Auntie, that you yourself are breaking your own rules. Let him rest and mourn silently for that haven of the moonshiners over there. I fancy that is what he must be doing, by those longing looks to the east. No use, Don; you may gaze and gaze, but you can't ride through the sun this week."

To his own surprise, he had found how much of a deprivation it was to be fenced out from the timber by that bullet; and to the surprise of the others, they found how many people from the "wooden" country tramped over the mountain to see him, and sat around on the veranda for hours asking questions, telling him the news from the timber, and leaving behind them a fine aroma of snuff and tobacco.

Riker was the most regular attendant. Even Becky Ann was over to see him, carrying under cool, green leaves some scarlet service-berries, the gift of Bud. But the Pagan himself had not returned after the one night when he had helped get Don home, and carried him, still insen-

sible, up the stairs and to his bed, vanishing again when the dawn came, and when, with returned consciousness, the doctor decided there was nothing dangerous in his hurt—only exacting some care from noon-day suns for awhile.

But day after day something of fruit, or sun-flecked trout, or some offering of the forest, reached him from Bud, telling him how he was remembered on the mountain.

"But he's some busy these days," explained Mr. Riker. "Over at the Ledge they look to him for some things sence Dick's gone. He's nigher to them than other folks. They're all mighty upset about Dick. He ain't on the mountain, naw, sir; there's men skulkin' round an' watchin' for him, but he hain't been seen."

"And she—Mrs. Le Fevre?" How odd the name sounded in his own ears!—Daphne's name.

"Krin? Oh, she's right miserable, I hear tell—'count o' the baby more than her ownself. My woman, she's been up some; says Granny's took a notion to you all at once; says if you keep on poorly she's comin' to dose you."

"Never felt better in my life," avowed Mr. Edson, hastily; "and if you happen up that way just mention it."

"I'll do it. Bud, he saw me as I was comin'; sent word along that if you needed anything he can do to jest let us know. Bud's a good hand with sick folks."

"I wish," said Don, suddenly, "you would tell me something of that man. Who is he? Where did he come from? And how does it happen he has such queer ideas of religion in the midst of a community of believers?"

"Well, now you're askin' questions," said Mr. Riker, settling himself willingly enough to answer them. "Fust off—he's jest Bud Lennard; that's all he or anybody else knows. His daddy an' him come here strangers, at a time when strangers was scarce in the wooden country; that

was about war-times. Bud was only a baby. His daddy was queer—kind o' foreign chap, folks reckoned; had books enough to stock a Sunday-school. No one knowed whether they was the right sort, though. Anyways, he burned 'em all up when he took his death-sickness. Old Gran Le Fevre, she could tell you; she was there, an' heard him say there was a curse in book-larning sometimes. They say he certainly did know a heap—lots about mineral an' sich, an' all about the stars, till he could most tell things was goin' to happen by them. Folks 'lowed 'twas witchcraft. Anyways, he turned agin it at the last; said he wanted his boy Anton—Bud, we call him—to grow up a farmer, or a woodman, as he said, jest to plow, an' sow, and reap, an' sleep healthy o' nights without dreamin'. So that's how come Bud was lef' to old Granny Keesy. She's dead now; lived paralyzed ten years afore she died, an' Bud, he took care of her jest same as if she was a mother, an' she wa'n't none too derved good to him, neither. But then, you see, he didn't know much about how mothers ought to be—never even knowed a mite about his own mother—not even her name. So that's how Bud Lennard grewed up; an' he took care o' the Keesys more than they did o' him. Pap Keesy eats there yet, mostly. Hadn't never any schoolin' hardly, Bud hadn't; lived too far out o' the way; most sixteen when he first did start, an' then didn't go more'n a month. The master, he 'lowed Bud was crazy, he had such queer notions, an' so Bud didn't get no more schoolin'; but he's picked up a heap some way, all by himself like. Some of it's queer stuff; but he's a square man, fer all his crazy notions."

Don lay back, with half-closed eyes, listening to this life-sketch of the man who had impressed him so strongly. Following the slow, gossipy narrative, he could understand with more clearness the man's conviction of a curse that

was laid on him. Who could tell what blood of race, or of scholarly instinct, was struggling within him against his own utter ignorance and uncouth surroundings? Don was not a deep thinker on things psychological; but in spite of himself there arose the idea of fate thwarting the desire of that dead student, who desired only that his child might live his life free of the doubts perplexing that come to scholars. The dead hand had burned the books of human wisdom, and the boy had turned instinctively to the never-closed, indestructible book of nature, and found it written in a language clearer to his understanding than the speech of the people about him; and groping blindly, he had yet caught, perhaps, at thoughts condemned by the man whose learning had been a mysterious thing to the mountaineer.

"Some jest naturally allowed he was possessed o' the devil," was Mr. Riker's final summing up of the defunct Lennard's personality, "an' that's why Bud jest took so quick to heathen idees 'bout religion."

"Yes, I suppose so," acquiesced Don, in the tone of a man too indolent to dispute; "but he has read some—read the Bible, anyway."

"Lord, yes! That's the only school-book he had, 'most. Gran Keesy, she had one; folks said she kep' it to conjer with, 'cause she couldn't read. She was a mite like ole Moll Le Fevre, only not so much so. She believed more in boys grubbin' in clearin's than school-books, so he hadn't nary but a Bible; an' he got meanings out o' it what the preacher said never was in it, so that's how he got nicknamed the Pagan, jest same as he's nicknamed Bud, though neither's his name. Folks call boys 'bud' sometimes, jest like they call girls 'sis'—short fer 'brother,' I reckon; an' Gran Keesy, she allers held there wa'n't sense in his other name."



"And you never knew any more about his family? That's strange."

"Yes, sir, 'tis. Folks here reckoned they come from Dixie, fer 'twas jest about war-times. The ole man—an' he wa'n't so old, neither—he had some money, an' built a log house, with a porch all round. Bud lives there yet, all 'lone sence Gran died; that's two years ago. Folks 'lowed he'd leave the mountain an' clear out after that, but he didn't; heap o' sickness around jest that winter, so he stayed on, an' I reckon he allus will now."

"Poor devil!" Mr. Edson's vocabulary of sympathy was not extensive, but the tone made amends for the lack of words; and his thoughts were so taken up with the narrative finished that he did not drift easily into the new topics Mr. Riker found for discussion.

"He's lookin' fer Dick, too," was the next he heard clearly. "Yes, sir; ain't sayin' a word, but jest livin' out on the mountain; an' he'll find him sooner 'n them paid spies, you bet."

"To give him up?"

"Hardly," grinned Mr. Riker; "that ain't Bud—no, sir. Curious, now; he ain't a law-breaker hisself, but he hain't no sort o' respec' fer the law when it comes to helpin' criminals. Has his own idees 'bout some crimes, an' 'lows a higher justice 'n the court house c'lects toll fer wrong-doin', an' never does make a mistake—that's his idee; but it don't satisfy most folks. Most folks want justice did now, right away, so they can see it, stid o' waitin' a life-time t' see how God A'mighty's goin' to square it."

"Naturally."

"Yes, sir, that's natural; but Bud, he says it's the animal in us all makes us feel that-a-way—says that right in the face o' the Bible-rule 'bout the 'eye for the eye,' an' so on.

Lord! Lord! it's right funny to hear him at times, he's got sech queer notions."

The ride to Indian Ledge, and its unexpected finale, was over a week old at the day Don listened to that outline of the Pagan's life; and he felt impatient at the doctor's restrictions, that kept him under a roof of shingles instead of where his thoughts were, across on the other mountain, under the roof of growing leaves.

And as he looked he was conscious of a murky cloud that was creeping over the summer sky; not a storm-cloud, only a heavy shadow that drifted low, creeping like a monster of the shades, with wide-spread wings, coming up over the mountain from the west, where the settlements are.

"It's them blamed coke-ovens on the other side," explained Mr. Riker; "they do send unearthly belches o' smoke up this way sometimes. Jest filled the timber with sut, they have. Hain't you noticed how black you will get in the woods?"

"I supposed it was from the charred sticks of forest fires."

"Naw—jest them blamed furnaces. Looks like hell down there at night; an' that's jest near what they are, too. Mountain men get down there sometimes, an' they don't come back the same; no, sir, it's a hard place, an' they come back queer citizens."

And long after Mr. Riker had gone the convalescent sat looking at the slow-creeping darkness shadowing the sun, and wondering a little at the unusual density of it; and then his thoughts drifted, as the cloud drifted, over to the far mountain, to the nooks and cavernous places he had seen there, trying fancifully to determine which of them, if any, now served as a hiding-place for the golden head that would be so hard to hide.

Other eyes noted that cloud on the mountain at Indian Ledge—Dame Le Fevre several times cast a "weather" eye upward to the widening shadow.

"Storm comin' up?" asked Krin, resting a moment on her hoe in the potato-patch, and glancing along the rows to the hills yet to be worked before the rain came.

"Naw, 'tain't that. Looks like west hill must be a fire, but 'tain't—leaves too green yet an' wet; but it's curious."

"Yes, ma'm, they are wet," agreed her daughter-in-law; "been rainin' a heap sence —"

Her voice did not finish the sentence, but her eyes did, wandering in a sort of habitual search up into the forests of moist leaves, noting every decided tremble of the low brush touched by the summer air; for in some covert of leaves or of rock the fugitive was hidden, and who knew what time he might creep close for needed help?

"Seems like a powerful long time's been gone sence," she added, with a quick sigh, and then went on hoeing potatoes; for through either sorrow or gladness there were mouths to feed at the Ledge, and the problem "how" was puzzling the young gardener to the extent of crowding out the luxury of personal hopes or fears or longings.

Dick's erratic sources of revenue had been things of vague fear to her. She had never been confided in regarding them, only picked-up fragments of conversation between Dame Le Fevre and himself had given her enlightenment full of forebodings, and she was conscious that now the household provisions must be secured in a different direction; and Krin gripped the hoe with renewed energy, seeing no help but in her own hands—not very big hands, either.

A man coming out of the timber into the brushy, badly cleared clearing watched with sombre eyes the bent form digging in the meagre patch, every now and then straightening its slim length with such an effort.

"You better be in with the child 'stead o' working at such-like," he said, gruffly, taking the hoe from her hands. "There, sit down a minute; you look's if you was ailing."

"No, I ain't," she said, trying to smile reassuringly, "jest some shaky; an' you scared me when you spoke, 'cause I never heard a step of you. You walk mighty quiet, Bud, to be big."

She had found a seat on a stump, and sat there while he finished the row and came back on another one.

"Why is it you find yourself shaky?" he demanded, digging with a great concentration of interest around a special hill. "Edie ain't took again?"

"No, sir, she ain't; she's brightenin' up wonderful these two days, thank the Lord! I've been some nervous, though, ever sence the other night;" and then, with a glance toward the near brush, "You hain't seen him, Bud?"

He shook his head. "Ain't on the mountain," he said, briefly. "I've been over it night and day."

"Did—did you see—the others?"

"Them looking for him? Yes; tried to follow me once. I toled them to the 'den,' an' then they must a changed their minds, becace they didn't come nearer. But there's men on the mountain covering the road, an' talking." He stopped work, listening a moment. "I heard them up there on the ridge; seems I hear them now."

"I don't;" and her head was poised an instant as the head of a partridge at the step of a hunter. "How comes it, Bud, you always do hear more in the woods than other folks do?"

"Don't hear any more than's there," he answered, with conviction. "I don't hear all that's there, either; only hints o' the things the woods has to teach. Jest hear their whispers sometimes, an' can't make out the words; that's

what does tantalize a man! But then," with a lowered tone of resignation, "if we live right, may be we'll know them hidden things in the next life."

"You mean when we're dead?"

"No, I mean when we're altogether alive; most of us ain't more'n half in this life. Look here, try—~~try~~ an' think, Krin! Ain't there times when your living seems like a dream to you, an' you know if you could only wake up you'd get out o' the troubles o' that dream? An' then the bit o' God that's in us 'll be stronger, an' show us how to work to help other souls that's asleep; an' then—an' then we'll know, too, the souls that belong to us, an' that we belong to, like we never could know clear in this life. Don't you never know them thoughts?"

She drew back in a distressed sort of way before the energy of his speech.

"Please, sir, don't, Bud," she entreated, wistfully. "Them thoughts is some like religion, but they ain't the church religion; church religion don't say we all are part of the Lord. No, the Lord's jest by Himself, an' some day, if we have the faith right, we'll all see Him; that's what we're taught, an' why must you go conjure up things different, Bud? You're good—you're powerful good to folks, but don't talk that-a-way. You do put idees in my head that's like witchcraft, sometimes; yes they are. I seem while you're talkin' just to hear an' see the things you do; an' it's wicked, oh, it is, Bud! an' I don't want to be wicked, I don't!"

Her voice, with the wail in it, made him turn his head away instead of toward her.

"Go an' get Edie," he said, in a colorless sort of tone; "I hear her crying, an' you'd better."

She arose obediently, but checked her going, at sight of the still form and the face so strangely turned away.

"Don't be mad, Bud," she said, falteringly; "it ain't you I think is wicked, it's the thoughts about the lives before this—the lives in the trees, an' the birds, an' the flowers, an' the notion that God is in them, an' in us, 'stead of in heaven. That's why folks call you Pagan; 'tain't that *you're* wicked. But I allow," she added, unconsciously exalting him—"I allow them unreligious idees would make anyone *but* you wicked."

For one unguarded instant he turned to her a face so alight with warmth and feeling that she looked startled, as when he had come on her unawares a little while before.

"Some day, Krin, we'll know all the things for sure that we only guess at here; an' I wonder—I wonder if you'll judge me as kind then. Will you? But"—and he shook his head—"that ain't no ways fair to ask; it'll depend on myself what judgment I get, an' it's sure to be justice. But if you *should* turn against me—"

He stopped, evidently having no intention of saying so much. The girl looked at him wistfully.

"No, sir; I ain't ever like to turn agin you," she said, "though I do wish you was more like folks that's contented. Folks ought to be contented, Bud."

"Don't know," he debated. "I've a notion that there wouldn't ever a been any improvements in the world if somebody hadn't started to be dissatisfied, and may be we'd all a been walking on four feet yet 'stead o' two."

"Now don't you, Bud!" she said, pleadingly. "You *make* folks turn agin you with that heathen talk; an' I wonder why it is you care special whether I do, for I don't know much! Is it—is it jest 'case I favor that girl o' yours, that one that died, or—"

"Yes," he said, looking at her curiously. "You asked me once before; I told you."

"I know you did—you told me some; but Granny, she

said there never was any girl around here looked like me. Did—did your girl die long ago, Bud?"

He avoided looking at her, as he said, gravely: "Some day, in the next world, when she is my girl—when she's given back to me—I'll ask her."

In a wondering sort of despair, she turned away from him, not unkindly, but uncomprehendingly, and entered the house. He watched her until she disappeared, then the light in his eyes changed, as the face of the earth changes when the sun goes down; and when she emerged he was hoeing away at the potatoes as if no thought more perplexing than their case ever crossed his mind.

"Granny, she's comin', too," she announced, holding the little blue-eyed mite up that he might see how it was improving. "She wants to ask you 'bout them men, the ones that were searchin'."

"Yes"—he had taken the child in his arms a moment, touching the velvety cheek softly with great tender hands—"yes, she's brighter; an' she's favoring you more and more, Krin. What's to be done with this family and this child, allowing that he has left the mountain for good? You've got to make plans."

"I know," she said, soberly. "I've tried to think, but I hain't been able yet; it's jest been on my mind heavy as that cloud hangs there, an' me a waitin' for it to break away. I've jest been waitin' like that for somethin' to happen."

He glanced up at the cloud, and gave her back the child.

"I allow you won't try to scratch a living out o' this ground, anyway," he said, digging again into the stony, rooty soil.

"I'd spin if I could get folks to spin for," she answered; "but I don't know—women folks seem scared o' this Ledge; Granny says 'case o' snakes. Sometimes I've been thinkin', Bud, it's becace o' Granny."

The approach of that lady made further discussion of the subject rather awkward, and Krin asked:

"Did you hear late news of Mr. Edson? I heard tell he dassen't go out in the sun at all."

"He was forbid a spell, but he's been seen walking a little ways. He's on the mend."

"I wonder—do you know," she asked, low and hurriedly, for the other feet were drawing closer—"do you know if he's set against us any for gettin' shot here on our account? I've been tormented some about that. Do ye think—"

"No, he ain't set against you; he thinks kind an' respectful o' you," he went on, with dogged honesty, "counting from the way he done that night, fetching the doctor, an' all; but s'posing he was set against you?" and he leaned on the hoe-handle and looked at her steadily. "S'posing he was?"

"Oh, I don't know," she faltered; "only I—yes, I would, too, Bud; I'd mind it a heap. He's been a comfort to me twice now. Yes, I would mind," she repeated, more decidedly, drawing the child closer, and rocking to and fro on the stump. "I ain't like to forget what he's done for me."

"I'll be bound she's goin' on about young Edson, now," cackled Mrs. Le Fevre, Sr.; "ye'd reckon he was nigh about God A'mighty, to hear her. Jest's ef he cured that chile! Huh! heap o' good them store medicines done. Not but what the young blade is all right," she added; "he's game, anyway. He caught the ball that was aimed for Dick, an' give Dick time to go. Heard anything new?"

"No special thing," he answered, resuming his work in a way that gave little chance for conversation. "Dick's clear o' the mountain; that's all I'm sure of."

"No signs?"

He shook his head.



"Gettin' mighty keen fer work," she observed, "when ye come up here an' hoe our potato-patch. Got none o' yer own?"

Receiving no reply to this ironical remark, she whistled to the dogs, and turned her steps toward the wood.

"Dogs are better company than human critters as won't talk," she decided, with them leaping and tumbling over each other to get closest to her. "May be ye'll find more gab to give the other 'widder' than ye have for me;" and laughing shrilly in laudation of her own wit, she turned away, and Krin arose to go back to the house; but a low, threatening growl from Dame Le Fevre's body-guard halted them both.

"Strangers!" murmured the girl, fearfully, and took a step nearer Bud.

"I don't think you have need to be nervous," he said, his eyes on the bushes; "it's the men I heard on the mountain. Yes, it is. It's Will Riker, an'—"

She knew why his speech had halted when the men came a little closer. One of them had been of the sheriff's crowd that night, the other she had never seen.

Riker's good-natured face looked troubled; he spoke in an embarrassed, hesitating way to the old woman, and then came down to Krin, who watched him with questioning eyes.

"What is it?" she asked. "Something we're to know—now what?"

"Well, Krin," he began, and stopped, looking around at the strangers as if for assistance.

"It's about Dick?" asked Bud, looking also at the strangers, who seemed to have come in no hostile mood to-day. They nodded, glancing with a sort of sympathy at the slim girl with the baby.

"Yes, that's what it is," said Riker; "an' I—I jest got

these gentlemen to come down along, when I met them, 'cause this one knows particulars," and he nodded to the stranger of the men. "He's jest come up from the settlements to give the word to this other one that it's no use layin' out on the mountain a watchin' fer Dick now, 'case—"

"He ain't found?" snarled Dame Le Fevre, in a voice that made the man nearest her take a step aside. "Neither one o' you two could take him! He ain't found?"

"No, ma'm, he ain't," said the stranger, overlooking her contempt; "none of them is found yet. You may know by that smoke how the pit is burning—an' has been since noon yesterday; there's no getting near it yet, and the men—"

"What in hell has Dick got to do with your pit?" was the impatient query; while Bud, seeming to divine what was coming, moved nearer Krin.

"He's got to die there, we're afraid," said the man, soberly, "along with thirty other men that were working there, and that they can't get out; and—look out there for that woman!"

But Bud's eyes were alert as the stranger's, and as she swayed, with a little cry of protest on her lips, he caught her and the child in her arms, both looking like frail pink blossoms struck down by the weight of that cloud on the mountain.

. . . . .  
"Are you still in a torpor from the monotony of the mountain?" asked Don, when the story of the lost miners was carried up from the settlements; and Dinah turned a reproachful, horror-stricken face toward him.

"How can you be so unfeeling, or imagine I am?" she demanded. "That horrible death—and that poor young fellow! What a fearful hiding-place to find!"

"There are just thirty other lives lost in that burning mine," he remarked—"good honest, hard-working fellows, no doubt—and from them all you pick just one well-featured renegade to be sorry for. Call that feeling?"

"Artistic feeling," said Miss Lottie. "It does interfere, sometimes, with one's view from a humane standpoint, and he was a fine study; but those poor men—poor fellows!"

"It is late to be sorry for them—days too late," said Don; "there is little doubt that death was instantaneous from the gases. Their tomb is already walled up, and their families are the people who need pity."

"Yes, indeed—yes, indeed!" sighed the little woman; "and this poor young man, Le Fevre, leaves a wife and child, I hear, and an aged grandmother. Dear! dear! Are they so very poor?—or do you know, Don, I was thinking we might go to see them, and see if we could do anything, you know. You could take us, Don; you are able to ride now."

He did not answer; but, in spite of himself, he smiled at the idea of introducing Miss Lottie to Dame Le Fevre—of leading this gray-garbed little wood-dove into the vulture's nest; and as the simile crossed his mind he remembered another life, just as surely fitted for refinements, that lived its blameless days in the midst of the vulture's coarseness; and the smile disappeared as quickly as it had come, and was evidently borrowed by Dinah, who was looking at him.

"Oh, Don, I had quite forgotten the most interesting thing in this series of calamities; but that wood-nymph is a widow now, isn't she?"

Mr. Edson favored her with a mild, uncomprehending stare, and returned again to the perusal of a county paper that gave the embellished account of the tragedy of the mine,

with an extra article in praise of the indefatigable sheriff and his efficient aids, who had just succeeded, on the morning of the fire, in tracking the young desperado, Le Fevre, from his mountain haunts to the doomed mine, where he had been employed three days at the time of the accident. The local writer dwelt at length on the evidence undisputable that had proven his identity: the coat left at his boarding-house was identified as his; the pillow on which he slept was stained by some matter he had used to change the hue of his hair—not quite succeeding, for his landlady had noticed the light curly rings showing about his temples that very morning after his ablutions at the public bath—the wash-bench. She had commented on the fact, and noticed it seemed to disturb him; he started at once for work, and had entered the mine some two hours before the terrible catastrophe that at present convulsed the community. The suspicious landlady had mentioned her doubts about the stranger—the mention had reached one of the local guardians of the peace; but fate had stepped in and set aside the decrees of human justice, and the walled-up tomb in the mountain held, besides the thirty respected and lamented workmen, the mortal remains of one young in years, but old in crime, etc.

There was also an incidental mention made of the man who had found fault with Le Fevre's make of whisky, and whom Le Fevre had accordingly "cut up" badly; his recovery was uncertain.

Mr. Edson had read the whole affair before, but waded through in sheer ennui and impatience, with his head that still persisted in aching if he ventured in the sun; for the bullet that had grazed his skull, deadening him for awhile, had a trick of making itself remembered, though it had not taken up a permanent residence in his anatomy. He had read an article in the county paper about that, too, in

which the editorial "we" regretted so serious an accident to one of our latest and most-respected citizens; and then followed an allusion to an unnamed renegade of the hills, a suspected confederate of Le Fevre's, who had interfered with the duty of the sheriff in securing that probable man-slayer. And there was little doubt in the editorial mind that ere long the untiring agents of the law would find in those mountain recesses, somewhere, the nest of outlaws and illicit distillers that had been known to exist for years; and when unearthed, there was a conviction in the mind of the public that the man who refused the sheriff entrance to Le Fevre's house would be found one of the leading spirits.

And when Mr. Edson had reached that finale, he threw down the sheet in a fit of disgust, wordy and emphatic, and then gathered it up again, marked all the paragraphs relating to the affair, and mailed it to Edson Senior, with a penciled line conveying the idea that the people mentioned in it were among the most interesting of his tenants and neighbors. And the reply that came was:

I'm coming out there to change things and bring you back. Would go this week, but can't. Reason, rheumatic gout. Don't be pig-headed. I give in. R. D. EDSON.

A note that was waved as a banner of victory before the eyes of his friends, and brought from Miss Dinah congratulations for that bullet-mark.

"Standing up there in that handsome fellow's stead was one of the best-paying moves you've made in business all summer."

"Yes, and then I had to stand such a short time, too," he added, complacently. And Miss Lottie, happening to be near, patted him sympathetically on the shoulder.

"Has the other 'suspected' run away, too?" asked Dinah, leaning back to catch the effect of some flesh-tints on Dick's nose that she was trying to finish from memory.

"I mean the man with the eyes, the one they say picked you right up off the porch;" and then she glanced at Mr. Edson's generous length. "Say, he must be very strong."

"He is. He'd make a much better modern Vulcan than that curled darling;" and his eyes rested critically on the uncompleted forge-scene. "No, he has not run away—not likely to. Riker tells me he is working at the forge, and people are beginning to take custom there now; this came from him," and he raised the cover of a home-made basket that had been brought not an hour before. It was filled with wild raspberries and a great yellow square of honey.

"Um! Well, he knows what good things are, anyway; and he is the Vulcan of the forge now, is he? And what about the rest of Mr. Le Fevre's belongings, will his friend appropriate them, too? For you know that Vulcan, though the least prepossessing of the gods, really did marry Venus."

"This is not Venus," he retorted; "this is Daphne, and Daphne never married anyone."

"Oh!" and Miss Dinah gathered her skirts closely, with a primly severe expression. "Then allow me to say that, from the nature of the lady's anxiety the last time we met, she is a person I can not possibly discuss with you, even in the presence of a chaperone."

And then the chaperone, mightily puzzled, declared she did not see what they were laughing at; and since they were dipping into Grecian mythology, they should try, at least, to remember the main facts of characters, and that Daphne certainly never was married—that sort of a finale would have spoiled one of the most beautiful of Grecian legends. And what was so amusing about it?

"I was only thinking," said the girl, wickedly, as she widened Vulcan's nostrils a trifle, "how many beautiful stories of modern life are spoiled by the same sort of a finale."

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE HOME OF THE PAGAN.

On a level facing the south and west, and half-way up the mountain, in total ignorance of the worldly suspicions directed to it, the domain of the Pagan basked in the sunshine and tendered its white clover for the bees' kiss.

Approaching it from the valley below, and up along the shady path, where the grape-vines droop their fruit low in reach of your hands, no stranger would suspect the iniquity that was lived there—the life with the mark of a serpent in its eyes—a life touched by a curse that had weighed as heavy as that hurled on the tempter in the Garden of Eden. And one of the surest proofs of the man's iniquity was that he did not believe the story of that temptation at all.

"It was the man himself who came across the field from the woods, with an ax on his shoulder, stopping a moment at the house of the bees, and leaning a practiced ear to listen for the sounds of a probable division in some of the colonies. A pet kitten came bounding over the grass, with a welcome in every graceful movement; white pigeons from the log barn fluttered to his shoulder, with never a fear of a repulse; and so the green-eyed monster was welcomed, though by none of his own kind, unless one accept his own pagan idea of souls that lived in dumb bodies, at times—"may be for making bad use o' words when they could speak them," he reasoned, and with the instinct of a true heathen, treated each thing of life as a possible brother. A real member of the genus homo awaited him inside the door—a bent figure that dozed over the few coals on the hearth, though the day was warm with the sun; and Bud

left open the door and raised the window to let out the rank smell of tobacco that seemed especially agreeable to the occupant of the corner.

"Pity ye can't lift the roof off," grunted the occupant, with never a glance around; "took ye mighty long time tuh cut a stick o' wood up at the forge."

"There was more to do," answered the other, quietly; "an' then it's a mile an' a half to go an' come."

The gentleman at the fire raised his head then, with a sound that may have been meant for laughter, and looking round showed the face of the eldest of those guardian angels who had garnished the store porch that spring evening.

"That's so," he agreed—"that's so; that's jest what old Moll Le Fevre, she tole out at the store, a spell ago. She was there, an' some o' them nobby city folks of boarders was there; so, jest for game, they was made acquainted; an' one o' them says, in an uppish sort o' way, 'An' pray, Mrs. Le Fevre, whereabout is it you be livin' at?' An' then she says (an' there was right smart of a gathering there, too), an', says she, 'Jest a mile an' a half from hell—come an' see me.' An' ye'd ought to o' heard the boys holler."

And this recital of mountain wit pleased him so mightily that he chucklingly filled another pipe, with mumbling reminiscences of the only other funny thing in his memory that was on a par with it; and the palm wavered between Granny's speech and a long-past trick of a Hallow Eve, when a crowd of roysterers shaved a cow's tail. The young man paid little heed to the reminiscences, evidently used to hearing his own abode given Granny's witty title. He stirred up the fire and set on the coals a pot of coffee, brought out some butter and cooked berries for the table, preparatory to the midday meal.



"Did Mrs. Riker bring up the bread?" he asked, glancing into an empty dough-tray.

"She didn't, but Bill did; it's there in that basket. Look here"—and he straightened up, with a combative look in the bleary eyes—"what's this here he's a sayin' 'bout you tradin' houses with them Le Fevres? I told him it was a plum lie."

"It ain't a lie, an' if they'll take this they're welcome;" and Bud halted a moment in his work of cutting the bread. "If I'm to run the forge, I ought to be there, anyway."

"Yer a fool—a plum fool!"—and the voice as well as the head was raised now—"a givin' away a decent house fer a shanty, jest fer a fool notion; but I see the workin's back of it—I see!" and his sagacious grimaces were a bit diabolical. "She's been a conspirin' fer this a long time—Lord, yes; I seen!"

"No one's been conspiring," and Bud's face flushed; "I made the offer."

"An' I tell yeh I see the workin's back of it," persisted the old gentleman, dropping his pipe in his nervousness, and forgetting to pick it up again. "She's had her eye on this place sence long afore Le Fevre died—I know."

Bud's face was no longer flushed—it was strangely white.

"You can't know what you're saying, Pap Keesy," he managed to articulate, though his tongue seemed unwieldy, and he sat down suddenly at the table—an example that Pap Keesy promptly followed, thinking the dinner was ready.

"Don't I?" he queried, in a tone that suggested volumes of suppressed knowledge. "Well, I do. Why don't ye pour the coffee, Bud? Yer allus so dead-set on the book-studyin' and sech-like that ye never give notice to people's doin's much; but I've seen what she's

aimin' at"—and something like a complacent vanity shone over the yellow mask of a face. "'Tain't the first time she's tried to get a holt on a man. Lord, no! Didn't even wait till Le Fevre was dead for that. I've seen her, many's the time, gallivantin' through the woods and around that old still with—"

And then Bud's hand came down on his shoulder as that of a cat would fall on a mouse, and the shake that accompanied it rendered Pap Keesy speechless, between lack of breath and amazement.

"You miserable—thing!"—and the green-gray eyes were not good to see with that expression in them—"hain't you, at your age, got any better thing to do than try to make some other folks black as the thoughts in your own mind? You're jest slingin' mud that won't hit its mark—only leave your own hands full o' dirt—that's what slander always does do in the end. And old as you are, and long as I've cared for you, you'll go out o' that door, never to come in again, if ever you say another word against—folks—at this here table." And then Pap Keesy was allowed to continue his repast, but alone, knowing that for awhile—for days, perhaps—speechless silence would reign on that particular corner of the mountain. It had happened so before, when something that was a trifle to Pap, or to any of the common-sense neighbors, had suddenly jarred on the pagan sensibilities of Bud, and sent him into solitary confinement, or out into the forest, where symphonies of nature throb always, with never a discord—never once lowering the key to the coarseness of feeling that is only possible to some phases of humanity.

And Pap, with his mouth too full for audible speech, turned half-way around at the click of the bolt, and, with a bow leeringly grotesque, gave his good-bye to present companionship, tranquilly continuing his dinner.

"Folks as is borned fools ain't to be held to task for their folly," he decided, charitably, and proceeded to slice down another section of the fool's loaf.

In the inner room were great windows that opened like doors on the double veranda that circled the building. It looked like a bit of the south blown by some freak of the winds up to rest on a northern mountain. About it were drooping arms of great spruce that never allowed winter to rob them of the summer's gift, and under the largest of them, not twenty feet from the door, nestled the mound among the roses, marked only by that stone cut by the son's hands, and bearing only the letters "J. L.," for Jacques Lennard; no age given—the son never knew that—nor birthplace, nor family. Just those letters to stand as a record for all that a life means; all the wealth of thoughts and emotions, sympathies and sorrows, that throb on through existence to judgment. Just two letters! And the heir of that problematic existence walked up and down, up and down, past the windows of southern fashion, at every turn his eyes resting on that mound, pink now with fallen rose-leaves, and again on a great old book-case that filled one corner of the room and mocked at him with its empty shelves.

"I wonder if I had all that used to be there, would the learning and knowing things help me to crowd back the ache here in the heart when I think of her life—an' would the books may be draw me away an' help me forget?" But something painful as the ache in the heart seemed to come with that thought, for he covered his face with his hands, whispering the hoarse protest of "No, no, no! that 'ud be worse, a heap worse; some o' the light of understanding come to me when she come to the mountain, an' the darkness fell away, an' I knew her, seemin' to see back—back to the past time through her eyes, an' on forward

across this gulf into the new time that will be—that *will* be! Even the worm that crawls can't forever hold its soul from winning the wings that God meant should belong to it. I must keep in mind o' that—I must keep in mind. . . . Did he, when he lived, know all that one look into a woman's eyes would tell a man of his own soul, like a lantern dropped into a dark cave where you've been gropin' an' gropin' a whole age? He knew books an' thoughts; he knew what it meant to want an' want to know things, an' then jest left me where he knowed I'd starve to death for the want o' what he took from me. And then folks talk o' love an' duty to parents," and he laughed shortly. "Their duty to you is first, ain't it? An' if they don't pay it—if they shirk it, what do you owe them? Nothing; not a thing."

And then, inconsistently enough, he dropped on his knees, with his head resting on the open pages of the volume whose teachings he was contradicting.

"But that ain't your fault," he added, after a long silence, and as if the book were a living thing; "an' I ain't never despising your words right through jest becace some men have told things in you that ain't fair to God. No, I ain't. You've been my friend, most my only one; but don't people have friends they like and jest grow to, an' all the time them friends have faults that you can't shut your eyes to, an' that you try to drive out o' them? I reckon so; an' that's just how I feel to you," and his big hand patted the pages in a conciliatory way. "She believes *all* of you; an' I'd like to—for her—but—"

Out in the other room was a rattle of dishes and pans, telling that Pap Keesy had finished his repast and was stowing the rest away out of reach of the flies; then the click-clack of his shoes and cane was heard, growing more and more indistinct, and the household had dwindled for awhile to one.

And the one remained there on his knees, with all his might trying to pierce the veil of life and its destiny; crowding together, as the untutored mind does, its gleams of wisdom and its crude reasoning of a child.

"Jest to kneel down has a sort o' comfort in it, sometimes," he told himself; "not to beg like they do in churches—no, only to think and talk to God, or the spirit o' good. Indians, they call it the Great Spirit—that sounds true, someway. Yes, jest to kneel—not to ask for things, for when you earn them you'll get them without asking; but jest to bow down before the spirits o' good, and thank them for sending thoughts that show you a little light to climb up by, up out o' the places where people go crazy."

To how many a mind, wise with the wisdom that is above speculation, would the surety come that the light had reached the pagan soul of him too late. So many of the same order of mind, however, brush against strange truths all through existence and never recognize them, and so never regret their loss. The difference with him was that his sense of loss was so strong—strong as his ignorance.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### DICK'S WIDOW.

When the dog-star watches over the summer skies, and the night-dews and the seething sun ripen the berries, more voices are heard along the trails in the mountain than in all the rest of the year put together. Neighbors who are inclined to be sociable club together their families and their dinners in quest of a profitable picnic, and hunt out those "old claims" cleared long ago by forgotten

woodmen, and climbing over nameless graves and over shattered, weather-worn hearth-stones, reach for clusters of the wild raspberry, that always seeks an abiding-place in the soil that has been trodden by human feet.

Of old, the path up the gorge and past Indian Ledge had been known as the trail to the best berry-ground for miles. It had fallen into disuse during the ruling of the late Mr. Le Fevre; but people remembered it now, and risked even an occasional curse from the present ruler for the sake of the berries that were a failure in the valleys; and not a few had a bit of morbid curiosity in creeping to the very edge of danger for a sight of Dick's widow and the old witch.

But Dick's widow kept strangely out of sight. Once or twice people who had failed to see any sign of her about the house were startled, in the dense thickets of the berry-patch, by that plaintive cry that was credited to a wildcat until a slim form would pass them in sensitive silence, carrying on one arm a basket of berries and on the other the child that cried; and then they knew that was Dick's family.

"Ain't so much for looks as I heard tell," was the general verdict of the women-kind, who saw no beauty in shy, sad eyes that were gaining a frightened look at every footfall.

Perhaps it was the rumors afloat on the mountain that made her more fearful of its dwellers than of old, for rumors of strange things were about; and few as the people were who spoke to her, yet some of the thought of local minds had sifted to her. Hard to tell just how much the *Weekly Dispenser's* opinion influenced that of the mountain, for there is magic in printer's ink; and although the mountain knew itself superior to the settlement, yet the mountain had not a newspaper and the settlement had, and so

was a mighty power, whether they willed or not. The mountain frowned down on the settlements—sent terrible storms plowing across the levels, while its own heights were scarce stirred by the wind; and the retaliation of the level lands was a wordy condemnation of the order of people whom the mountain gave life to. And the condemnation had grown and thrived in the wake of editorial suspicion, and even crept up the range. Petty thievery that at any other time would have been blamed on the settlement folks up berrying, was now laid with dubious surmises to “the gang” of which the paper had spoken; and the probable location of the gang was a thing furnishing food for much controversy. Every stranger seen in the timber was reported at the Roads’ council, and received his particular share of comment. But strange nocturnal figures had been seen, according to “Ole Pap” Keesy and little Jake Riker, and the puzzling thing was to tell whether they were strangers or ghosts, for they had not spoken.

“Two of them,” related Pap, with a certain air of mystery—“two of them a totin’ something, an’ never a word out o’ them, right up above Injun Ledge, on Tuesday night. I was out a lookin’ for hogs, an’ got belated. I kind o’ coughed, but nary a stop or a hurry or a word out o’ them, an’ before a minute they seemed to drop into the ground; an’ I made up my mind they warn’t nothin’ livin’, then, an’ I made tracks.”

“What did it look like they was totin’?” queried one of the curious.

“Well, I’m flummixed about that; wasn’t a bar’l—too long—just a long, queer—”

“May be a coffin?” suggested another; and as Pap could neither affirm nor contradict it, the decision went abroad that it *was* a coffin.

"Up on Injun Ledge, too," and heads were shaken with fearful significance around more than one hearth; "up along the Ledge where ole man Le Fevre's 'still' used to be, an' where Gran Keesy, in her day, swore ole Moll had her gatherin' o' witches an' devils on witch-nights. Up along that special side o' the mountain, where all sorts o' bad has been, is where things is seen totin' coffins now."

"An' then Dick Le Fevre, he never did get a coffin, neither," was another reminder offered; and that fact was immediately given as proof that it could not have been any other thing that disappeared with those figures descending into the earth; "but who was helpin' Dick to 'tote' it?"

"What does Bud say?" someone asked Pap.

"Don't know a plum thing about it; I didn't tell him. He got one o' his fits on 'cause o' somethin' I said about ole Moll—didn't amount to much; but he just raved an' charged, an' hasn't spoke sence. Naw, I won't tell him nothin'."

"He knows so mighty much about the wooden country, I shouldn't s'pose even a ghost could creep in it 'thout his say-so."

"May be Pap had been takin' an extra dram with ole Moll an' was bewitched that night," laughed one of the skeptical.

"Little Jake Riker, he wasn't takin' drams, an' he saw a man skulkin' up there, right curious," retorted Pap—"a man with whiskers—black—all over his face. Now, who is there in these parts looks that way?"

No one knew, and the people had a mild sensation to gossip over; and some curious ones went in crowds up past the forge, as if to track the ghost, but sundown always found them home, or on the way to it, so the ghost-hunting did not prosper.



It was impossible, however, for Krin not to be aware that more people than she had ever seen on the mountain now passed the Ledge and stopped at the door on the flimsiest of excuses. One or two women, who noted the young face of her, asked, with curious sympathy, if she was not "some scared to live up there so far from folks;" and her own wonder at their sudden interest was only equaled by Granny's fury over it, and small welcome was there for a passer-by at her domicile.

Krin, filled with mortification by the old lady's general tone of conversation, avoided as much as she could being in the house when anyone came up from the forge, as they did sometimes. Don would see a fleeting glimpse of her vanishing along the path to the milk-house, or out across the clearing for berries, until she seemed more than ever a creature of out-of-doors. In fact, he liked best to think of her so.

In love with her—this wistful-eyed little widow, whom he could never realize was a widow any more than he had realized before that she was a man's wife—was he? Was he not? He had tried to put himself through a process of examination on that point after Dinah's tantalizing innuendoes, and the examination had resulted in a series of whistled solos, and little else, beyond taking for the first ride after his illness the path to the forge.

"What you mean shyin' off that-a-way any time young Edson's up yere now?" demanded Granny. "Thought yeh sot sech a heap on him an' his doin's."

"Yes, ma'am, I do," agreed her daughter-in-law. "He's mighty good, I think; but I—I don't feel much like talking to folks these days."

"Grievin', I reckon," and the old lady's smile was not good to see; "a grievin' for the man yeh run away from once, an'—"

"Hush!" and the girl's face was strangely white. "If I'm to keep on livin' here, I can't bear another word said over that. No, I didn't want to live with him. I won't lie; I never lied to him about it—he knowed; an' if he had been good to me, may be it 'ud been a heap different. May be I'm not grievin' like wives grieve, if that's what you mean; but I've got my own grievin's, jest the same."

"Oh! I'll go bail it ain't anything yeh can't tell Bud;" and Granny herself was surprised at the look on Krin's face.

"What you—ta'ntin'—'bout Bud for?" she asked, looking very squarely at the old woman; "you've done that 'fore this, jest 'cause you two had words over that forge. I hear folks is talkin' bad 'bout him, but I don't rightly know why. If that's what you're ta'ntin' over, I want to know."

"Ask him yourself," grinned Granny; "he'll tell you, in course, whether he's got a 'still' hid on the mountain, an' whether he's part of a gang o' counterfeitters an' all" (Granny's imagination was adding to the very slight gossip she had overheard); "an' say," she added, as the girl turned away contemptuously, "he might tell yeh what folks are sayin' 'bout your goin' up to his place to stay; that yeh couldn't scarce wait for that mine to close up till yeh went to livin' together."

A sharp cry of protest broke from the girl, and she sat down on the bed where the baby lay, looking at the old lady with so steady a stare that the amiable creature stirred uneasily, with a pretense of hunting for tobacco.

"Do folks say—that?"

No reply from Granny, who had fired her biggest gun, and disdained a slighter affray.

"Do you think that?" But Granny evidently had no opinion, and the young mother turned to the baby as to her last refuge.

"And it was all for you, Edie," she muttered, catching the child up as if to gain comfort from its closeness. "All so you'd have a pretty home to have in mind when you grew up. My baby! My baby!"

The child blinked up with the big wise eyes with which children look love and dependence into the older eyes that gain strength from them; and from her mute little confessor Krin raised her head defiantly.

"He knows better; he ain't thinkin' wrong of me—him! Why, he's jest like a father would be, I reckon. He's queer, but he ain't wicked. He don't *do* wicked things" (though the poor child could not, according to her light, say that his ideas were all blameless); "an' then, he's a heap older than me—an' then—"

She was stumbling confusedly for evidence, in every corner of her brain, that it would be impossible such thoughts could have come to him too; but in the midst of her reasoning she stopped suddenly.

"If folks think an' talk like that I'm goin' away," she decided, in a voice tremulous between shame and anger. "I'm goin' before he hears it, too. I'm goin' away from the mountain."

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### MATCH-MAKING.

"Don!"

"Yes, your highness."

"Oh, you are back, are you?" and her highness peeped around the corner of the porch. "You are wanted at a family council."

"What?"

"Well, I suppose it is that," she amended. "Anyway, my aunt and your uncle have been having a talk three hours long,

to which the outer world has not been admitted; then they asked for you. I told them you were over the hills and far away, and Edson Senior scowled."

"Oh, he did"—and Edson Junior picked up a club—"scowled at you. Where is he?"

"Upstairs; he has the foot-ache again. He asked me what in the nation took you gallivanting around the country before daybreak. I told him you *said* it was because the noonday sun objected to you."

"Um! Kind of you to help me out so nicely. Did you also add your own opinion?"

"I did," announced Miss Dinah, promptly. "I confided to him my conviction that you had a lion's share in that talked-of 'still' that rumor says is pouring whisky down from the mountain, that there was no doubt in my mind that you and your ruffianly confederates took the hams that are missed from our landlord's spring-house, and that the only puzzling thing in your late leanings is how in the world do you ever expect to eat the three bushels of dried peaches that were taken last week from Mr. Dumphey's."

"You have been helping me out beautifully!" he agreed, dropping the club, as if it was entirely too trifling for the present emergency. "Now, may I ask what diabolical scheme you have in view? My utter disinheritance, I presume, from the headlong fashion in which you have been making love to him through the whole forty-eight hours since his arrival. When am I to call you Aunt?"

"I—I haven't proposed yet," was the reply, flanked by an exaggerated simper that was too much for Don's gravity.

"You humbug!"—and with a swing upward he reached the edge of the porch, leaped over the railing, and was beside her—"are you going to disinherit me?"

"I believe," she said, laughing up at him, "that it would

have been the best possible thing for you if someone had done so years ago."

"Granted—but now?"

"Oh, now? Well, you know it is never so easy to say what is best just now as it is to be certain of what would have been best a year or two back. My intuitions tell me, however, that Uncle Edson is going to give you as strong an inducement to go back to where there is some enjoyment in life as he did to have you leave it five months ago."

He balanced himself nicely on the railing of the porch, humming an air, to either collect thoughts or scatter them, and finally said:

"He is a dear old fellow, and I owe him a long list of duties, but I wonder—I wonder if I don't owe myself one or two?"

"Now don't get so ridiculously serious over everything! It's all the influence of these serious-visaged natives. How long has it been since you heard one good hearty laugh? Not for one summer, I know! Come along."

And taking him by the hand, she whisked in at the door, and up to the door of the studio.

"Go in and hear your doom"—she laughed and drew back—"I'll stay outside and pray for you; pray that you will have sense to take the goods the gods provide."

"No, you don't!" he retorted, and held her fast; "if the doom is too heavy, I'll need you to help me bear it."

And holding her fast, they made an entrance more sentimental than usual, and halted, laughing and with clasped hands, just inside the studio door.

The unconventional entrance did not, however, seem displeasing to either Miss Lottie or the portly, shaggy-haired gentleman who sat near her. Don knew in a moment Dinah was right, that it was some question of

moment on foot; one glance at the iron-gray shock of hair told him that—under ordinary circumstances its position was smoothly recumbent; but when Edson Senior grappled for ideas he always began running his fingers upward through his hair. The depth of his feelings on a subject could be judged from a passing glance at his cranium, and just then it was in a ferocious state. But his eyes were not, as he turned them on Miss Lottie and exchanged with her a pleased confidential comment in one glance; and the quiet elation in that little lady's manner had given a real pink tinge to her cheeks.

"Glad to see you back, sir!" said Mr. Edson, looking at them frowningly, but with twinkling eyes; "and with that sort of an escort. I'll swear, from the accounts I hear of your associates, I am continually expecting to have you march in with a sheriff as guard over you."

"She is worse than a sheriff," answered Don, with a nod toward his prisoner; "the sheriff only grazed my skull with a bullet, he didn't try to blacken my character."

"Oh! I did not!" she cried, in quick defense. "I did not tell a thing but the truth, and not all of it;" and then she looked up with tears of laughter in her eyes. "I never said a word about the widow, Don."

"A widow? Good Lord!" roared Edson Senior, in a voice that left no doubt of his own terror of the species; while Don, with one annihilating glance at the informer, gripped her hand closer.

"Now you *have* done it," he growled, while poor Miss Lottie, with the most distressed expression, turned from one to the other.

"Now you could not find the least bit of fault with this widow," said Dinah, reassuringly. "She is the prettiest thing imaginable."

"Oh, Lord!" grunted the senior, impatiently.

"Except her husband," added the girl, her memory reverting with pride to her picturesque model. "There's a picture of him in the corner; if he had not departed this life, I have a conviction I should have eloped with him before the summer was over, and left the wife for Don."

"*Dinah!*" pleaded Miss Lottie, in a flutter of shame, while the senior suddenly arose, and as suddenly sat down again at a reminder from his lame foot.

"And I nagged him into coming up here with the hope of settling him down," uttered the senior, in a colorless tone of retrospection that nearly sent the two culprits into convulsions. "A widow! Good Lord, deliver us!"

Don had seated himself on a big chest just inside the door, and was comforting himself with the mere shadow of a whistled melody, but never once letting go the hand of Dinah, who squirmed uselessly, but gave in when those grappling fingers would not bend.

"Humph! Glad to see you have sense enough to attach yourself to that sort of an anchor," said the senior, after a rather steady stare at the pair of them. "The most praiseworthy thing I remember of you for the past five years has been your liking for Dinah; and that she understands and has patience with you is so great a point in your favor that I have concluded, after a talk with Miss Lottie, to—in fact"—and his eyes were smiling in the kindest way at the girl's startled face—"to recompense you."

"Going to give me an aunt," hazarded Don, *sotto voce*; but his listening prisoner had no smile this time.

"It is about three years," continued the senior, growing more benignant with every sentence uttered, probably softened by the picture of those two young people waiting with clasped hands; and they were both too good-looking for the picture not to be a pleasing one—"it's about three

years since you first acknowledged your liking for each other."

"Longer than that, ain't it, Dinah?" queried Don, in the innocence of his heart; but it was she who gripped his hand closely, half-fiercely, at the question, and though a little puzzled, he hesitated not at all—man is so much a creature of habit—and promptly pressed the slight hand in a way caressingly assuring. The senior and Miss Lottie exchanged beaming glances.

"Well," continued the chief speaker, "you are both, according to your own confessions, likely to disgrace me if I don't provide guardians more capable of watching you than your present ones. Your father, Miss, sent me, with his full approval, knowing the—the leanings you have each been playing fast and loose with too long. We'll have no more widows or their husbands in the question; we'll have no more fast and loose business; we'll have no more wild woods adventures; but you shall have an allowance enabling you to live like Christians, and we'll have the wedding as a wind-up to this exile up here!"

The senior's voice had been gradually rising to the occasion until an amiable roar accompanied the final plan and promise, and then he dropped his chin and glowered at them in a leonine fashion from under the mane that looked so much more aggressive than his twinkling eyes.

"Come and give me a kiss, now, for putting the pair of you out of your misery," he commanded; but Dinah stood still, with a very much flushed face, mechanically grasping Don's hand, while he was looking blankly at her for some cue to speak, but all he got was a little closer clasp of her fingers—and what might not a man think from that? He did not know, and the whole thing was so ridiculously sudden that he could not think at all. Miss Lottie was smiling on them tremulously; the senior was so entirely



satisfied with having crowned by his approval an evidently much-desired affair, and altogether—

"Oh, bless you, never mind, then," broke in the master of ceremonies. "Give the kiss to him, instead; and you need not blush so about it. Yes, give the kiss to him, to keep company with the one I caught you giving him three years ago. Oh, you thought the old man was blind? Not a bit of it; but love was that time, so don't say a word."

An altogether needless precaution. Both the happy ones of the party seemed speechlessly happy. That kiss! Yes, to be sure, he had kissed her when going—well, he had forgotten where he was going, but she wanted to go too, and he had coaxed her into staying home, and kissed her; and was it possible she had remembered it under all her seeming brusquerie, and had he been a condemned fool not to see it, and—well, what a muddle! But he managed to rise up under it; he even walked under it across the room, leading his speechless fiancée.

"Most people have to manage such affairs just their own two selves," he remarked; "but we are luckier than that, Dinah, ain't we? At least, I am the lucky one, if you approve this ogre's plan; so if you are willing to accept such an uncle you may give him that kiss;" then he looked at her and smiled. "And all the time you cheated me into thinking it was an aunt's kiss I was to get."

"You haven't got any yet!" she flashed back.

"Oh, yes, I did," he answered, coolly—"three years ago; and you have been taking advantage of that weakness of mine to snub me ever since. So you are the goods the gods were to provide?"

"And that I prayed you to have sense enough to accept!"

And Miss Lottie's tender, sentimental ideas, that had been jarred upon somewhat by the senior's bluntness, received a

final blow from the two young people, who, in the midst of a certain perplexed embarrassment, looked at each other and burst out laughing. The only redeeming point in their hilarity was the detection of a slightly hysterical element in the merriment of the girl; and Miss Lottie promptly arose and drew her away with a manner that expressed her own knowledge of the sympathy needed in such cases, and the gentlemen were left alone, feeling themselves very ignorant of all the things which her apologetic, deprecating nod should have conveyed to them. But at the door Dinah's natural self rose above her emotions, whatever they were, and she halted long enough to ask:

"Don, how in the world will you break the news to the widow?"

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### A MYSTERY OF THE HIGHLANDS.

Whether Dinah's persistent allusions to "the widow" had the slightest foundation in belief, Don had not an idea. They had teased each other for years over their several flirtations, or possible tendernesses—the frankness with which they had ridiculed each other's tendencies was comical, viewed in the new light of their absolute engagement. Of course it was an event that had always been looked on by the families as a thing to be, and, to be sure, Dinah and himself had for a little while, three years ago, when she was seventeen, rather given them cause for their ideas. But three years ago! and those two seniors looked on that episode as if it was yesterday! Don asked himself, cynically, if anyone but a benighted old maid and bachelor would take that view of the matter, or expect that changeless order of things from human nature. Yet, had he not

wished for just such an anchor in life to chain his drifting years? Had not the lack of women in their home been the one thing that had sent the senior and himself floating purposeless in risky channels? Each of them had been conscious of that, and "When Don gets married" had been for a long time the understood time of comfort to come in their bachelor household. But if Dinah was placidly content to walk with him now to the sacrifice, why had she snubbed all idea of it not so many weeks ago? The snubbing had hurt him then—he remembered feeling hopeless for days; but when he had risen above it, and found this new pleasure in living—drawing in the freer, fresher life and impulses of the forest—he knew that she had not really touched him at all, except to kindly thought. She had belonged to the phase of his life that had much of the superficial in it; and the influence that had urged him to be more than superficial—what had it been? When he got himself cornered with that very direct query, he finished the soliloquy with a whistle—a whistle that did not quite succeed, however, in dispelling a vision of a rude interior, a slim pine coffin, and a wistful face rising out of the shadows. To tell the truth, however, the effect of that vision prompted him into an immediate adjournment to Dinah's presence, and an impressive tenderness of manner that was a delight to the seniors, and checked completely the things Dinah herself had been making up her mind to say to him.

Despite persuasions, Donald Senior refused flatly to be driven through the drivable part of his domains.

"No, sir, I'll keep to the house and the ladies," he decided. "The place will be yours some day, so make what plans you please, only there must be no permanent location of yourself up here; this little girl is not going to be a woodman's wife; round your business up in shape for an agent. But I've had enough of living alone, with only my con-

science for company, and it twitting me morning, noon, and night for having insisted on your coming up here. I give in, I tell you; and when I do anything, it is a wholesale affair."

And he was really trying to make it so, even in view of Don's absurd liking for the place—laying out plans for a house they would build some day up on one of the highest peaks, and where they would all come for awhile in summer.

"Not just a few isolated souls," he said, "but a jolly party—some men we know and some of your girl and woman friends, my dear, so that there will be more than one pair of lovers to be found when the summer's over. We will all come, and wear out our old clothes, and bring nothing with us worth stealing to tempt those tenants of Don's."

"Now, how is it to be known that it is his tenants?" said Miss Lottie, in remonstrance. "I am sure they can not be so very bad when he is really fond of several."

"Just the reason he *is* fond," returned her niece. "Don is developing a most shepherd-like bearing toward black sheep out here—even getting shot for the handsomest and blackest."

"Well, now, so far as being the blackest, if you mean that poor Adonis, I am sure we heard no stories of thieves around here until since his death."

Dinah looked at her with admiring eyes. "Why, Auntie, how clever you are this morning! Are you trying to help Don study up a defense for his flock?"

"And if I am any prophet, there is one of them now," and the senior pointed down the road, where a shambling ancient was seen coming closer, and eying the tempting rotundity of the ducks that waddled along the lane ahead of him.

"Well, if he has many like that, he will need to build

infirmaries instead of saw-mills," said Dinah, with scant sympathy for her betrothed's fads. "That is Father Keesy."

"Yes"—and the senior twisted his head around at a dangerous angle to get a better view of him—"yes, there he is talking to Don. I wonder if we will have him as an addition to our dinner-party. Does Don go so far as that?"

"On the contrary, visits from his 'wooden' friends too often mean that we must take our dinner alone. Their attractions are usually the strongest."

The senior reached over and touched her hair in as caressing a way as Miss Lottie's own.

"You're a good, patient little girl," he said, with a certain sympathy in his tone, "and I'm not sure but what you'll understand Don and his ways better than I ever did—I liked him too well to be the best sort of a tutor."

"I sha'n't err in that direction," laughed Dinah; "so you had better warn him."

The old gentleman only shook his head fondly, so sure that no influence could be better for his boy than this frank-spoken, unaffected girl who had known him all her life.

But, considering that she was a female bit of humanity, the girl was strangely perverse under all attempts at petting and demonstrations of interest in her future state of blessedness; and just then she evaded the sympathetic pair of them by calling from the window, "Going again?"

Don nodded and blew her a kiss, a thing at which his visitor chuckled and grinned.

"Sprucest gal as I remember gettin' sight of among town folks" he mumbled; and getting no reply, he added, "Reckon I'll jest walk on."

"All right; I can dispense with your blood-and-thunder recitals," said Don, sourly—"go on."

"Who is that latest one?" queried Dinah, still from her perch in the window.

"A Mercury. Don't you want to add him to your studies of types? What a messenger of the gods!"

"He is more likely to be a messenger from a goddess," she retorted, and dodged behind the curtain to escape the only missile near him, the golden wheel of a sunflower.

"Shall I give her your love?" he called; and she leaned out, peeping over the disk of yellow leaves, and laughed.

"Are you tired of it already, Don?" she asked.

A kiss is the simplest answer to all love-queries, and costs so little (at the time), so a second was flung upward to her; and the smile that went with it was so gayly reassuring that words were not needed.

He eyed the shambling shanks of Pap Keesy disapprovingly, as he caught up to that gentleman, and knew that all along the "back" road he would have to view that rickety pedestrian, unless he turned pedestrian himself.

"Here," he said, frowningly, as he dismounted, "get on this beast; I'll walk awhile."

Pap made not the slightest of demurs; he just climbed up gruntingly, and sat very erect, with an attempt at jauntiness, for a rod or so, and then slowly settled in a sort of heap that was no more pleasure to view than his painful gait.

"I wonder if he could do or be anything that is not repulsive," thought Don. "I suppose it is only because he is old and ugly, but why need he suggest all things that are unpleasant?" and then, aloud, he said:

"Why is it you did not tell Mr. Lennard, instead of coming to me this morning?"

Something like a wink distorted Pap's left eyelid.

"They's reasons," he said, mysteriously—"reasons. Fust off, it's on your land—you're the gentleman to look

it up; an' second, if so be as it's a family as don't live a hundred miles from our place, Bud, he's queer about them—he'd go right there 'n give 'em notice, er else—"

"Well, what?" asked the younger man, impatiently.

"Er else he'd jest skip the kentry an' give notice to nary."

"You are a fine specimen of a friend in need," remarked Don, contemptuously. "He gave you and your wife a home, didn't he—took care of you both for years? Can't you do something better than put his name in this?"

"Now, don't ye kick afore ye're spurred," suggested the equestrian, untouched by the other's disdain. "I said they's reasons" didn't I? Well, they *is*. Who's out trap-sin' the timber like him at nights—eh? What's it fer, yeh reckon? Folks says he's witched an' cust an' sich. Naw, sir; more I see, more I know he's jest cute—jest cute enough to fool folks most sence he could gabble—yes, sir. Then he talks sort o' religion—'tain't no religion at all, only it jest makes folks think him serious in his mind, an' never a spectin' him to mix up in Dick's sort o' ways. Oh, he's cute; but he's mighty close kin to them folks, however yeh fix it. An' that gal o' Dick's—"

"You mean his wife?"

"That's who. Well, Bud an' her's thick as hops—least they was."

"What's that got to do with the—the blood you say you saw on the old road?"

"Don' know," was the cautious reply. "Ole Moll is a terror to the girl, but they hain't killed ole Moll; I heerd her callin' the dogs as I come; an' I don' know *who* it is, but there's been *something* done, an' someone's done it."

"The longer I think about it, and the more you talk about it," said Mr. Edson, coolly, "the more I'm inclined to think your whole account has more lie than truth in it;

and I wouldn't come a step for your story if I didn't have an errand over anyway."

"All right, *all* right," returned Pap, amiably—"that's your way o' thinkin'; but s'posin' ther's been some killin', the law can't say *I* hain't done duty—naw sir. I've give notice to the man o' the land." And then, after a jarring silence for awhile, he added, "S'posin' anyone's missin', I reckon there'll be a reward?"

"Shut up," growled Don, who was gaining a beastly temper with every foot of ground he was covering. At first, the old man's statement of a something mysterious on the mountain—blood on the leaves and grass above Indian Ledge, and a trail for a little way where something had been dragged—those first bare facts had aroused his interest; but the farther he went the more ridiculous the quest seemed, and the more Pap mumbled his own suspicions the greater grew his companion's disgust for some phases of human nature.

"Right down curious that I see them signs so plain nearabouts where the ghosts was seen," was the next remark of Pap.

"Ghost? Whose ghost?"

"That's funder on yit," was the reply, meant by the tone to suggest all that was mysterious. "Naw, you hain't heard, I reckon—you hain't been around much for awhile back; but it's been seen. Yes, sir, somethin' was—two of them a totin' somethin' atween 'em, over a week now. I reckon it was jest a warnin' o' somethin' to come; an' it's come."

"Who saw the ghost?"

"I did, with my own eyes."

"Bosh!"

"Leastwise, I didn't take it for one, but folks say it must a been; folks say it's Le Fevre done come back to tote his



coffin, 'cause he never got one. Anyway, they toted some-thin', with nary a word, an' dropped into the ground like jest ahead o' me, along the 'still' ledge—the ledge where old Le Fevre's whisky-still was."

"Did you ever," asked Don, in his blandest tones—"did you ever hear of a man called Ananias?"

"Naw; who's he?"

"I am just puzzling my own brain to answer that," mused Mr. Edson. "There are times when the rather peculiar views of Mr. Lennard seem perfectly in keeping with truth and justice. It never occurred to me so strongly as just now when I remembered Ananias and looked at you, and wondered if it could be possible that even a supreme being could manufacture two such souls. No, n-no," and he contemplated Pap with so profound an earnestness that the rider edged over to the other side of the saddle as much as possible. "I don't remember the features of Ananias myself, but I have a conviction that if a picture of him were in existence it would look like your twin. Where have you been putting in your time for the past thirty or forty centuries, Ananias? Hold on!—where are you going?"

For with a dig of his long heel and a "Jup!" the venerable equestrian endeavored to hasten his steed out of the reach of its owner, whose serious, calm reasoning had simply given Pap an idea of the sudden collapse of intellectual organs.

"I'll lead the horse the rest of the way," decided Mr. Edson, catching at the bridle. "You see I want to be sure, Ananias, that I will have a horse when I get there."

"My name is Keesy—Abe Keesy," corrected Pap, his bleary eyes alert and watchful, and plainly showing some doubt regarding his companion.

"Oh, yes, your present one," agreed the companion.

"Your proud parents gave you that before making inquiry of your past existence? Yes, I suppose so; but don't you believe them. They've been trying to cheat you out of your birthright, Ananias; but you'll get it yet if you persevere. Now whereabouts is that spook-laden, blood-stained, ghost-haunted spot at?"

"Over yonder p'int," said Pap, sullenly; "but ye can't go it on critter-back."

"Neither can you, then—get off!" which the rider proceeded to do, with watchful eyes and a close grip of his bony hand around the staff he carried.

It was not far to walk over the "p'int"—a jut of rocks standing on edge, like great gray teeth of some buried monster. About the roots of them, in the shadow of the pines, a few bushes grew—just a straggle of huckleberries, and sandy places where old leaves lay.

Pap stopped there, with a startled "Ho-ho!" of astonishment.

"This is it," he said, poking around like a weasel in every cranny; "but they've been a coverin' their tracks."

Again the word "Bosh!" arose to Don's lips. His small stock of belief in the whole story had been dwindled under Pap's additions to it until the only desire he had left in the matter was that his guide had more of robust youth in his frame, the temptation to thrash him was so strong.

"What is your little game, Ananias?" he asked, glancing around the scrubby growth that was trampled and bruised some, but nothing more—stop! was there nothing more? His eyes, keener and younger than Pap's, saw close in the shadow of the rock a tuft of leaves, colored as leaves color in October; but it was not October, and birch-leaves do not turn crimson, but gold.

He sat there eying them, and listening to Pap's

expressions of wonder as not a vestige of sanguinary signs could he find.

"Someone's been tromplin' all over, stirrin' up the leaves like hogs 'ud root, an' strippin' the brush o' leaves whar the blood showed; not a derved sign kin I see of it."

"What did you have to drink this morning?" asked Mr. Edson, with bland curiosity; and Pap scowled.

"Not a derved thing. Naw, sir, 'twa'n't drink. I *seed* them signs thick yere, I did; but they've been trompled over, an' riddled, an—"

"Exactly," agreed the other, "just as hundreds of places on the mountain are trampled over where cattle range; and, as I asked before, what is your little game? Now, Ananias, I would advise you to go home and stay there, say a few prayers for the good of your soul, and don't encourage yourself in any more ghost-seeing. You're bewitched, Ananias, and you got a delusive hope in your addled brain that I would pay you something for your trip over there this morning—that's why you cantered over to me instead of to Riker, or nearer neighbors; but you've been playing on the wrong bank. I'm broke. The only pay you get from me will be the privilege of getting home with a whole hide, if you go quick; but if I hear any more of your attempts to give my corner of this mountain a bad name, or if you go telling anyone else about this morning's trip—well—" And the suspended speech suggested little less than some form of instant annihilation.

The fact that Pap really had counted not a little on a possible recompense made him look a bit guilty under Mr. Edson's remarks—a great deal more guilty than he really was, as his merciless antagonist was partly aware of.

"But if he don't deserve it for this trip, he probably does for something else," reasoned his judge, looking down on

him from that exalted moral standpoint human nature is prone to when the other fellow is at a disadvantage.

"All right, *all* right!" mumbled Pap, in an impotent sort of vindictiveness. "*I* ain't tellin', 'less it's in the court house; an' that's where it'll end, I'm tellin' ye!"

"So I hear you say," remarked Mr. Edson; "and before you take the trail home, Ananias, just point out the corner of the earth where that ghost dropped into with its coffin, will you?"

But Pap would enlighten him no further. "Git some other Ananias to guide ye," he retorted, in just wrath. "Go an' git someone that ain't forty thousan' years ole, an' be d—d to ye!"

For some time after the old gentleman's departure, Mr. Edson sat thoughtfully staring, without restraint, at that cluster of strange-colored birch-leaves; and something more. In the gray sand washed down from the rocks was the fresh imprint of a boot, a boot with the mark of a clumsy patch that crossed the sole; and Don felt a fresh anger against Mr. Keesy's suspicions as his scrutiny convinced him he had seen that track before. He had noticed it because of the patch, as its wearer had walked ahead of him through some clay near the forge; and its wearer was the Pagan.

"Nothing ghostly about that, anyway," he decided, and then wiped out the mark with his riding-whip. "If that old croaker were to come back and see that, he might think—here, hére, just keep your own thoughts in order, young fellow! I wonder where in thunder that old 'still' was?—that's where he said the ghosts walked."

But look where he might, no clew was offered by the forest; no path in any direction, save the old road where his horse was tied. The wide fronds of the fern and the white spires of the rattle-weed grew tall and unbroken,

save right there where he sat. There they were beaten down somewhat, but only for a short distance; and then the rocks began to crowd out of the ground, until you could walk far as you could see and never touch the soil with your feet. And then, down along there somewhere must be that crevice across which he had seen Daphne materializing from the laurels. Ah, that beautiful night, with the witchy, unreal atmosphere of it! He called himself a fool, sometimes, for the ridiculous way in which that memory affected him. What the mischief did she mean coming like that, with the young eyes of her flitting through the shadows of every laurel he passed, and the tender, wistful voice of her that came filtering through memory to his senses, as the gold of the sun's shine sifted through shadowing leaves.

"This won't do, my boy," he muttered, jumping to his feet and starting down toward the rock-land where the chasm was. "This sort of thing is getting too frequent, very much so, and it isn't what you came to the wilds for, anyway; and more than that, you are an engaged man, and a lucky one, too—you've got a girl that's too good for you. Just remember that, too, and be modest and satisfied."

And thus whimsically reasoning with himself, he kept on through the places where the trees grew sparsely, and often grotesquely, among the great gray stone.

Climbing up an eminence whose layers of sandstone made inviting stairs, he halted for a final glance over the untamable bit of wild land below him. A great dip, like the cradle of some gigantic thing, lay rock-bound and bedded on the bosom of the mountain; along its sides arose huge battlements, pine-crowned and birch-lined, looking like a series of ruined castles that reached away into the distance, their gray walls defying the annihilation of time—their forms, under all the smother of wood-

growth, still retaining the semblance of entrance and colonnade, windows and watch-towers, that invited research into those mysteriously shadowed interiors.

"I can't imagine a more interesting place for a spook to loaf in," he decided, after a long look from the turret of his selection. "But it doesn't seem just the place for a native spook, for the natives care mighty little about the grander phases of their mountain's beauty; a big drove of hogs on a white-oak flat, when the acorns are a good crop, would touch their sensibilities much closer, and—Halloo! is that it now?"

His cynical soliloquy was broken in on by a white body darting through some brush below him. At first glimpse the form could not be distinguished; but emerging into the open rocky plain, he saw it was a dog, a great white hound, that was a sort of familiar spirit of the elder Mrs. Le Fevre.

But it was not that lady herself who was following the hound's course; it was a man, who was running over the level bits, leaping over fallen logs or other obstacles, and finding unerringly the quickest path over every barrier that was raised between himself and the gliding white form—and all in silence, not a bay from the hound, not a word from the man.

They were coming closer, closer. Now the hound crosses the trail he had left. It halted, throwing up its head and snuffing at the air, and its follower's speed slackened; stealthier movements crept into it as he advanced, warily, warily, with head thrust forward, as if he too were scenting the game.

"Well, if it is a spook," concluded the watcher, with a breath of relief, "it's the Pagan's double, so can't have much harm in it—what the mischief—"

The hound gave a short bellow, and came on a lope

along the tracks Don had just left, and then the Pagan, with his searching eyes ever ahead of the hound, looked up and met the gracious nod and smile of the man above him.

"Halloo! what are you running?" asked that individual.

And the man below looked at him a bit before replying; then he said, "That hound."

"Oh! Just exercising him for the hunting-season, are you? Isn't that exhausting on a man's own frame-work?"

"Yes, it is," agreed the hunter; "and it's some warm to-day, too."

He looked warm, and took off his hat as Don descended the irregular steps to him. He looked embarrassed, too, and turned the wide straw covering around in his hands uncertainly.

"I didn't count on sighting you out here," he said, moistening his lips as if he found speech in some way difficult; "didn't know you were on the mountain, anyway."

"I haven't been very long. Fine view one gets from that summit there. I was looking for the old 'still' I've heard the folks speak of; the one the veteran Le Fevre worked before your time or mine. Can't you get at it from this direction?"

"Yes, sir, I reckon you can;" and the man sat down on a convenient ledge, and replaced the hat after a few desultory waves of it in the form of a fan. "Yes, sir, but folks don't generally go sighting round it much; 'tain't anything for looks, an' then they do say a ha'nt walks there."

"That's the place; it's the 'ha'nt' I want to see. I thought it was that when I saw your dog coming. Where has he gone to?"

An impatient exclamation broke from Bud.

"I clean forgot that hound," he said, and ran rapidly up the incline where Don had been, Don following; but look

where they would, down along the border of the basin, on either side of the ledge, or clear across the dip to the other rise of the rock-chain, not a glimpse could they get of the white moving form.

"That's curious; looks as if the dog was a spook, after all. Where do you suppose he has gone?"

"That's a question," returned the mountaineer, his eyes still bent watchfully along the little valley. "He may run a mile an' never come above ground. I—well, no use trying to follow this time."

"Whistle on him, or call him," suggested Don. "What's his name?"

"Don't you whistle!" and the other turned on him suddenly. "Don't call, either; it's no matter."

"Only my curiosity. Why, you say he can run a mile through the alleys and by-ways split through the rock. I had no idea of such a stretch of half-caverns along here; and of course I'm curious to know the resources of my claim."

"I reckon, but folks allow it ain't no ways lucky to have to do with Indian Ledge; and then—"

"What are you doing here, then?"

"Jest followed that hound; reckoned he tracked something."

"And you going to hunt it without a gun, or even a revolver! You ought to have a bow and arrows, though. I've an idea they would suit you best."

"I reckon not," answered the mountaineer, with placid seriousness; we never see them hereabouts, an' I never did carry fire-arms. Taking the breath an' the soul out o' the things in the woods jest for the sake o' saying you could hit them ain't in my line—only because they don't take speech, too. Lots o' folks don't claim it's murder; but they



can all talk, I reckon, in their own way. I've got notions like that, anyway, and notions agin bloodshed."

"Not strong enough ones to keep it off your boot," remarked Don, trying to speak lightly and carelessly, yet feeling, against his will, Pap's insinuations repeating themselves in his ears, as he saw across the instep of the other the unmistakable mark of a blood-stain; some pool of water into which he had stepped left the boot wet, and brought out that mark redly in the warm sun. The man again looked vaguely embarrassed, much as he had done when he first saw Don in his path.

"I wonder now, my friend," mused Don, very strictly to himself, "if it were a murder pure and simple, and you as chief actor, would you show a particle more excitement than that mildly troubled look? No, I guess not; that's one of the comforts of being a pagan, I suppose."

But for all his self-query, he lost none of the muttered disjointed words of the other as he assayed with a brush of moss to wipe off the unpleasant marks.

"A—a hog of mine—young shote—it was killed—killed early to-day—up on the ridge."

"Yes, I know," said the other, blandly; "there by the point of rocks this side the old road."

"You got good eyes for the timber, even if you did grow up in town," was all the comment the Pagan made as he threw away the bit of moss; and again Don felt a sense of impotence when he met the serious gray-green eyes. How was it at all possible to question that serenity, or the innocence of it?

"Were you on the way any place?" continued the suspected. "The sun's about half-way across."

"I told you I was looking up the old still and the 'ha'nt.' Who haunts it?" asked Don, with sudden directness.

"It ain't easy to know;" and the mountaineer arose, as if

to talk as they walked along, and Don had nothing to do but keep step with him if he wanted to listen. "It's an old ha'nt—years an' years. Folks say there was murder there in old Le Fevre's time; and a revenue officer did come up here an' never was seen any more. And then some say it's jest old man Le Fevre himself that ha'nts there, and floats, lights and all, down where the ledge runs out and the glade begins. I've seen the light on the cranberry-swamp myself, but there wasn't any harm in it."

"*You've* seen it?"

"Yes, I have, more than once. Jest a little blaze like a star that's fell, and floats above the grass. Yes, it's a ha'nt, I reckon; but I don't know what for. Some say it's old Le Fevre's soul a burning out on the swamp, 'case they wouldn't even give him hell-room; but I don't believe that there. Souls burn—yes, they burn"—he nodded seriously—"but it's in a different way—it's with the fire in here;" and he tapped his head; "a fire that's worse than brimstone. I hear some o' the churches say they can pray your soul out o' the brimstone-fire, even when your dead in this life. There's times I grudge them folks that belief, an' then there's other times—most o' times—when I'd sooner jest crawl along under my own load; it makes me feel stronger, someway, an' the more I'm made to carry at a time the sooner my work will be over; and you see when a man feels like that he ain't a going to beg help, or depend on other people's prayers after his own breath is gone—no, sir! You see he just don't dare turn coward that-a-way."

"Bud, do you ever allow yourself to think of anything more cheerful than the warmth of the hereafter?" demanded his listener, scowlingly. "I was enjoying life on that watch-tower up there—rather glad I was living, and had such a good view of everything—and here you come with

your theories of hell and knock my serenity galley-west. Don't worry over hell till you get there."

"I didn't."

They had reached the point of rocks where Mr. Keesy had been baffled over the loss of "signs." Don halted, glancing about him again in a way the Pagan noted, for he said:

"I'd jest as soon you made no mention o' that pig that was killed here. Someone's jest toted it off, an' I've got some reasons for laying low about it. I'll tell you what they are, may be, some other day."

"You think you will—I mean, that you will tell me?"

"Yes," said the other, looking at him with that placidity that was growing irritating to Don—"yes, I reckon I will."

Just then a golden-winged oriole darted low past their faces, and so close that Don took a step back in surprise.

"I should have liked to catch that fellow," he observed; "they are beautifully marked, and I never saw one come so close in the woods."

The mountaineer smiled, and, walking away a few steps, dropped down and lay on his back in the ferns and wood-grass, making a queer little sound that was half a whistle, and pulling his hat over his eyes just enough to keep the sun out, he seemed waiting for something. Don simply stared. His impulse to question was checked by a little flutter somewhere above him, and two birds, darting past each other like butterflies, gradually lowered, and finally lit, without the least sign of fear, on the outstretched arm of Bud. Another and then another came, until seven were stepping daintily and flutteringly over him—robin and wren, bluejay and redbird, to whom he chirruped in a friendly way, but never closing his fingers over them.

"That oriole heard you say you wanted to catch him," observed their charmer, "that's why he don't come back—

they know;" then he looked up into the wondering face of the other and smiled. "I don't know jest what I have been, any more than you do," he said, in his slow, insistent way—"nor what I may be after this; but jest now I ain't anything that the birds thinks bad of. You've got some notion in your head that is doubtful o' me—I can't see yet jest what; but jest try for a little while and mind that the birds ain't scared o' me."

He arose, and the birds darted away again, some only a short distance and returning again, others disappearing in the high trees.

"And I don't reckon you've got cause to think doubtful," he continued. "I don't want you to have, and I don't think you will have, unless—"

He hesitated, with a look of those green-gray eyes that made Don drop his own.

"Unless what?"

"Unless you do a wrong your own self to someone else. May be you don't know what I mean yet; but if the time comes you'll know, and you'll remember."

"I have not the remotest idea of your meaning," broke in Don. "I do someone a wrong? Well, I promise you—"

The mountaineer shook his head. "Don't you be making promises, even to yourself, an' putting them into words," he said. "You're taking the power o' the future into your own hands when you do that, or you're aiming to; an' it's like the challenges to God I spoke of that other day. There's a something stronger than us beyond us that reaches out a hand, and strikes our hearts, an' shows us the weakness o' words and our power to keep them. A promise is like a link in a chain, and the chain doesn't need to be long to make a man a prisoner."

"I fancy that Pinkerton would bid wildly for my services if he imagined I could be secured," said Mr. Edson,

in self-confidence, as he regained his saddle and watched the Pagan's form go from him again through leafy screens that little by little hid him. "I have no doubt that anyone in my stead would have strong convictions of suspicion after the rather curious incidents of this morning. But I—instead of finding out the thing I should have, I am just given a dissertation on hell, a bird-show, and some vague advice that I guess I said 'thank you' for, and here I am!"

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## CHAPTER XV.

### BUD AND KRIN.

The drowsy, slumbrous songs of the woods told of high noon; the sun was half-way across, and on the bare cabin on the Ledge it beat pitilessly. Not a tree reached out an arm to break the force of either sun or storm there—the nearest tree to the door was always the one used for fire-wood by the household; and the only sound that now broke the quiet of those heights was the ring of an ax out in the edge of the cleared space.

Bud, coming alone down through the laurel, listened to those sounds with a growing darkness in his eyes. His step on the porch was answered by a little sleepy wail within, and entering, he found the child struggling for wakefulness in its nest of pillows. He quieted it by much the same crooning sounds with which he had talked to the birds, touching so tenderly the waxen flesh of it with his great brown hands. He laid it again to rest, and with a comprehensive glance about the cabin, closed the door softly and walked out to where those aggravating sounds still rang.

"Jest stop that!" he commanded, when he got within

speaking distance; and Krin dropped the ax and leaned breathless against the young chestnut she had been working to bring down. "You hain't any call to do that sort o' work," he continued, as she did not speak; "you're getting thinner an' thinner with all this care on you; you're—"

"I surely had to have some green wood to bake with," she protested, "an' so I had a call to get it."

"I was past here this morning; you know I'd a done it."

She shrouded her head in her apron to keep off the sun's glare—evidently the one sun-bonnet in the family was doing other duty—and drawing back out of reach of the ax, stood in embarrassed silence while with a few strokes he brought the tree crashing its length on the ground, from which the dust raised in a cloud.

"This dry spell is sure to end with a big storm," he said, glancing across the open space where the heat quivered upward; "there is signs of it every place in the woods, an' the bees are a telling."

"Pap Keesy, he 'lowed things was dry enough for a forest fire," she answered; "but there ain't ever any forest fires this soon, are they?"

"When did you see him?"

"A little while back; soon after you passed. He's riled at you some, ain't he?" A nod was the only reply. "I reckoned so. He's riled at Mr. Edson, too; swore a heap at him, though I couldn't just make out what for. He said Mr. Edson was on the mountain to-day; is he?" and the eager interest in her voice was duplicated in her eyes.

"Yes," he said, shortly—"gone over the hill to Riker's." And the ax, flashing in the late August sun and buried with even precision in the heart of the fallen tree, checked further conversation. Length after length of the wood was cut, split, and tossed aside, and she sat there watching the

swift energy of his work, but not questioning again, except once to ask:

"Was Edie asleep yet?"

He nodded without looking at her, and again an air of constraint fell about them, one that at last he broke by leaning on the ax, studying attentively the grain of the wood before him, and asking:

"What's he—Pap been saying?"

"'Bout Mr. Edson? Oh—"

"No; 'bout me."

"Well, first off he sighted you somewhere back there with that houn' dog o' Granny's, and wanted to know mighty curious what you got him for. I didn't know you *had* got him; I 'lowed he'd gone after Granny."

"She ain't back yet?"

"No, she ain't. The older she gets the more time she puts in out on the mountain. Don't know what she does do up there—just spells, an' 'xperiments o' herb-roots, that's what she says; but I don't know. Pap, he tried to kind o' scare me into tellin', an' I was scared the way he's hintin' at folks; but I never can tell what I don't know, an' I don't allow to follow where *she* goes to find out, either."

"That all he was saying?"

"No, it ain't;" and her eyes faltered under his own. "He was askin' if we'd heard anything curious on the mountain last night, an' if—if you was here last night, an' what sort o' friends you and Mr. Edson was now, an' all o' them questions mixed together, but him actin' all the time like they all had to do with somethin' that's a mystery, an' that he's allowin' to find out. He talked about that old ha'nt that's a walkin' again—the first time in ten year, he says; an' he got me so scared with his notions! Bud, *is* it that ha'nt come back as a warnin' o' trouble? An' what's folks to do that's just got to live here an' take it if it comes? Sendin'

'signs' like that ain't any use when folks can't get out o' the way; an'—"

"*You* can get farther away if you've a mind to," he answered, quietly. "I told you—"

"No, I can't; I *got* to stay here! I—" Then she stopped suddenly, and turned to him with a deal of earnestness in her questioning. "Bud, I want you to say what you think about that ha'nt. Do they come back—and ought a person to try an' do the things they say or sign to you of? I'm troubled."

"Yes, he's been jest trying to scare you for plum meanness. Them ghosts o' the old still and the glade ain't a going to do you harm. I don't allow anyone seen the ghost, anyway."

"Pap—he—"

"Pap, he lies," was the brief reply. "I wouldn't believe him."

"Don't you believe in the ghosts, anyway?"

And seeing the troubled fear in her eyes, he shook his head to reassure her.

"No; an' you mustn't, either. Folks jest scare themselves at shadows when they get to being afraid about ghosts."

"Well," she said, with a little doubtful, disappointed sigh—"well, Pap Keesy, he did worry me. I was powerful glad when he left. He means something that ain't good, the way he's bent on findin' out so much about the doin's o' folks. He did worry me."

"You hain't done anything you're afraid o' him knowing"—and the statement was half a question, as he looked at her—"that ain't why you're scared?"

"No, sir, I ain't!—nothing I've been real 'shamed of sence that time I run away. Then I was some ashamed—to come back."

His face was turned stubbornly away from her as she



answered, in the subdued tones that showed even now her half-shame over that crime against duty. Through all his knowledge of her, she had never yet induced him to say a word either in commendation or blame of that past act; and his very silence always added to her conviction of her own fault. But he seemed not to hear the voice with the humility in it, or see the eyes that unconsciously asked comfort. He only asked, briefly:

"What is there about one man's spying around to scare you, then?"

"'Tain't jest one man, though!" she burst out; "it's lots o' folks. They've been talkin' a long spell now. You never do hear things folks say, 'case you're always thinkin' o' things way above them, and you say and do things that's curious, an' never tell any of them why; an' now that there's queer things on the mountain—strange men seen that *somebody's* a hidin'—they're most all pointin' to you, an' there's trouble comin' out of it all. Granny, she cut the cards last night, an' she seen trouble in them, too. And I wisht—I wisht it was over!"

"Is it them notions o' theirs about me that makes *you* keep so far away from me lately?" he asked, quietly. "Is that why you changed your mind about taking my house? Is that why you'd come out here and cut wood till you'd drop sooner than ask me for help, like you used to do—is that the reason?"

"I don't know. I'm bothered a heap—about things. I wisht you wouldn't ask me like that—it only bothers me more; and I wisht, oh I do wisht you had some religion, like other people, an' wouldn't have wicked thoughts an' ways that makes folks think bad about you! That's what sets them against you, an' makes them say you're sold to the devil—an' I wisht you was different."

"I allowed that was it," he said, in a smothered sort of

way. His eyes as he questioned her had the strained intentness that sees the shadow of the blade above him. The hardening whiteness of his face as she spoke had in it all the realization of the blade's blow, and the death in it.

He looked at the figure of her sitting there with the half-shrouded head, and never a thought inside of it of the rapture or wreck words of hers could bring a man. Slight, shabbily draped body—so insignificant a casket for the holding of a soul. He asked himself if that soul would forever be shrouded as the head was from all understanding of unseen bonds that he felt were forged for all eternity? Did never the force of his own life, that was drawn to her, touch her for one instant with the knowledge of hidden power? So slight a thing to bear such power; so slight a goal for the race of a man's life—or the embodied realization of what life might mean. Yet, which of us is able to gauge the weight or power of any influence until it touches ourself. The treasures other men strive for are such dross, only our own are all real, all compelling. Not that he had ever dreamed of sharing her life as the wedded about them lived, the pagan mind of him accepted the fact of her bonds that were for one existence. But if he closed his eyes and dreamed dreams of some future—well, they were only dreams, but they had sweetened life sometimes, those faint, far-reaching shadows through which he made his crude guesses at substances.

He looked at her with all the weight of those substances crashing and thronging on him at the knowledge that she was shrinking from him through distrust.

"What if I'd lie to you?" he demanded. "That's what I'd do if I tried to make folks think I'm different than I am. If my thoughts are wicked thoughts, how am I to change them? They're *me*. We can't change our minds any more than our faces, I reckon; they just grow in us

according to our deserts—some fine and clear, an' some troubled and wicked. Some like that chestnut-tree there, straight and even in the grain, ready to split or saw for any use, a tree that's a blessing to the woods; and right there beside is a gum-tree, jest as big, jest as straight on the outside, but in the wood of it are the twists and the crooked turns, and the stubbornness of it, that they say lightning itself won't split. Men an' women are that way, too. It's all in the soul they start with; the seed that dropped from the tree of their other life. Why is it you're so set against them thoughts, and say they're wicked?" he asked, almost pleadingly. "Why, they've give me all the hope I've got in life, them thoughts. I'd be different in other ways if I could, but not to give up thinking that way about life an' God's plan for souls. I can't drive that comfort away, or think as the folks here do; that is, to get a preacher to think for me, and reckon I've done my duty to God A'mighty if I set two hours of a Sunday and listen to him. That's what they do, and then tell lies to a neighbor on the way home for the sake of a horse-trade, or go straight to the woods an' steal timber off some other man's land the next morning—and think they're mighty smart to do it, too, and beat someone out o' something; but they only beat themselves out o' the thing their lives have a right to be. They're like rattlesnakes that bite and poison themselves, lest any hand that reaches out to them for help might get it. They make themselves cowards, and they're afraid o' death—so afraid that they dress it in black. And you wan't me to live by their notions? I can't do it; I'd go crazy. I remember the times I tried to believe them. I've been given these convictions to keep me from that. I know it; and I'm thankful. There ain't a night, Krin, when I don't kneel and say so."

He talked, walking back and forward. He had half-for-

gotten even her presence in his crude reasonings and arguments—all he had to raise him above the blinding pain of her distrust.

Cold, far-off comfort, when from the blows of humanity one can turn only to the slow justice that sums up impulses and acts at the end of a life.

But when it is all one dare claim?

What use to try and make him see or care for the opinion of people when he only drew away off like that into speculations where it was wicked to follow? He said he knelt—yes, but how was one to know to what power? Had not the devil ways of making evil seem right when once he set his claim on a soul? Krin had heard so. She listened to his words, but drew farther away, in a sort of dread.

"I don't know rightly whether you're good or bad in your mind," she faltered; "you're earnest, but it ain't with the Spirit o' the Lord. You set folks agin you, an' you don't care; but you *ought* to care. You ought to think more o' people right around you than to wonder and wonder over souls that's far off. Here's where you've got to live—on this earth, among folks; an' you ought to try an' make them think well of you—an—an—"

She broke down—not crying, but trembling and half-frightened at her own temerity. However fearful her own doubts had been of him, she had never before dared put them into such plain words, or condemned as trifling the atoms of wisdom he believed had come to him. Suddenly, out of her own ignorance and humility, she had arisen as a judge, and he felt the weight of her hand added to the others that had outlawed him.

"Don't you be afraid of my—wickedness," he said, lowly and very gently. "I'll keep away, now that I know—how you feel. It's jest another big wall built up between us for

this life—but some day, in some other one, may be, you'll know better whether I tried to be good or bad."

"Some *other* life!" she burst out, with the tears trembling in her eyes and her voice. "Oh, Bud, Bud! what if there *is* no other life? Here—now is the time we're livin' in the world—may be never any more; an' then what of your notions? What of puttin' all your hope so far ahead that you'll never reach it—when right here—"

She was stopped by his hand on her shoulder—his face, white and passionate, bending so curiously near her own.

"It ain't safe for you to say any more," he said; "you're as much of a child as that baby o' yours I put asleep as I come out here. You don't know the weight o' your own words; but I can't bear any more o' them. Don't look so scared—I don't think I'd harm you—but—"

His voice, low and hoarse, did frighten her. She reached up, trying to loosen his fingers, but her hand also was caught in his own trembling ones, and held—held—held—while she could only whisper in terror:

"Oh, Bud! oh, Bud!"

"Yes, I'll let you go," he said, looking down into her eyes, and seeing only the dread there. "You needn't be afraid o' me and my wicked thoughts again so long as you live. I'm letting you go, you see; and when I can do that—go! go into the house where your baby is. I'll keep away now that I see. One lifetime—one lifetime!"

She did not try to speak—the weight of some unspoken thing back of his own words left her dumb; and when he let go of her she turned away sick and dizzy, her lips unconsciously echoing his words—"One lifetime!"

And when she reached the cabin, and dropped on her knees by the baby's bed, she heard through a prayer the regular ring of that ax out there; and it's echoes bore to her the same words, with the sound of his strange tones in it.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## HAUNTED.

A long, long time seemed passing, but she did not move. Was the trouble to come—the trouble the cards told—already here? She had meant to say nothing to anger him—what *had* she said, anyway? His eyes seemed yet burning into her brain; his voice would ring in her ears, and drove out remembrance of her own words; on her wrist was a mark turning blue from the cruel grip of his fingers—and it all told her that the gentle, wise, uncouth friend she had had was gone. Was it all the result of those terrible unchristian ideas of his that had made him turn on her like that when she entreated him to be more human—more like other people? She supposed so. She remembered the Bible had words in it about keeping far away from the wicked people, lest one's own garment be smirched by black through association. Not the words, only the sense of them, was with her, and she knew it meant the people who turned from the right religion, as he had; and she supposed there was no use in even praying for him—a soul that shut itself out from the church—and then she never felt good enough, or sure enough of her own peace with heaven, to dare pray for others; only the preachers and “professors” dared do that, according to her lights on the subject—lights that never showed near brightly enough for her, cut off as she was from association with people of “convictions.”

“But may be since I *ain't* jest one of the Lord's chosen, that rule about the good folks keepin' away from sinners don't jest mean such as me,” was the only tangible bit of reasoning she could arrive at. “I hain't never took communion, an' I reckon my robe for heaven ain't so near

white yet that *that* much black is goin' to show bad; an' if the Lord'll forgive me, I'll risk prayin' for his poor lost soul once, anyway."

And so she knelt there, praying for the man who had lost faith in prayer, but who had been good to her so often. After awhile the sound of the ax ceased, then she heard a step, and was conscious that he had brought it and stood it by the door; then the step died away again, and she was alone with the fears and the dread that she had but half-acknowledged to him.

"If I could only jest go away, Edie an' me, an' I could get work, not too far from the woods, an' jest live an' mind all his kind ways that used to be, an' all the powerful strange things he's told me o' the words the trees an' the wild things try to say to people—if I could jest do that, an' forget all the other wicked thoughts that make me afraid, I'd be a'most happy, Edie an' me; but I can't go, an' I daren't go—an' I haven't a soul left to speak to, only Mr. Edson. He's—he's like an angel a'most when I think o' him after other men—yes, an' women! Never a word that ain't kind, and always that way of laugh that he has, jest as if he ain't a tryin' earnest to help folks be good. Oh, I could tell him; I could tell him *all* better than ary a preacher."

Had her wish the strength to draw him there, or was it his nearness that had touched her thoughts and made her conscious of the need of him? For there was a step on the slab porch, a knock at the door, to which she scarcely knew if she answered or not; and as her landlord pushed it open a bit he saw her standing in the middle of the floor, as if poised for flight.

"You actually look as if you were afraid of me," he said, bluntly. "Why is this thusly, Mrs. Krin? And is not madame the dowager here to lend you courage?"

Either she was too frightened or too embarrassed for reply. She leaned against the table, as if really needing the support; but he might have read a flattering relief in her eyes had he dared receive it as such, but he did not. Fresh from that self-communion of his in the woods, he looked past danger and over her head, and jotted a white mark down to his credit in his new duty-book. Then she remembered her manners, and offered him a chair, with a deprecating mention of being "some shaky these days, an' nervous."

"You are working too hard" he decided, with an attempt at a fatherly manner that would have fitted the robe of a patriarch. "You are wearing yourself to the very shadow of a Daphne."

But she shook her head, a sort of pride impelling her to the denial.

"No, sir; I don't reckon it's all that, though there is a heap to do, but—"

Why don't you take Lennard's offer to change places, so he could run the forge?" he demanded. "You could get some return for your work there—the best fruit around here, and the house is a little home-nest."

"Yes, I know, an' I would like it 'cause of Edie; it 'ud be mighty nice to bring her up where the flowers grow around the door, 'stead o' them," and she made an eloquent gesture toward a lot of pigs and a big spotted sow dozing serenely in the path leading to the spring. "But Granny, she won't!"

"And you expect, then, to live on with her?"

She glanced in that same startled way at the door and window, and sat down as if the chair had been a corner she was driven into.

"I—I don't know," she said, helplessly. "I did say I wouldn't, but now—"



She crossed the room to the bed where the baby lay asleep, and seemed to gain some courage from looking at its serene sweetness that had no dependence but her.

"If I was only sure it wouldn't do harm to Edie," she began, but halted uncertainly.

"Why, you said just now it was for her sake you'd like the other place!"

"Yes, I know; an' I want to tell you I do, for may be you'd know what to say. "Oh, I—I'm nigh crazy these days, Mr. Edson—I am. An' you—you helped me to a heap o' comfort before—an' if you—"

She was almost hysterical, and he stared at her in amazement. Surely this nervousness, that seemed in part terror, could not all be evolved from dislike of the crude surroundings.

"Tell me what is wrong, then," and in spite of himself his tone was a caress; "but please do not look so frightened or despairing. Some way out of the difficulty will be found. Tell me what it is."

"I'm afraid," she half-whispered; "can't tell you here, nohow. Where you on the way to now?"

"Down the valley to the mill," he answered, wonderingly. "My horse is at the forge."

She took from a peg on the wall a splint-basket, and threw the apron over her head.

"I'll go a piece along, if you don't mind," she said, more sedately. "Granny, she's gone up the mountain after herbs in bloom, an' I allowed some to go for berries, anyway."

She lifted the sleeping little one with much care, lest it waken; but swift and decided as were her movements, he saw she was tremulous, and even after the door was closed behind them her eyes seemed peering into every covert of leaves—into every nook where shadows lay.

"I'll tell you when we get clear of the laurel," she said

once, as he followed her wonderingly; and, with a keen sense of the ridiculous, he carried the berry-basket while Daphne led the way with the child in her arms—not for a flight into the laurel, but to get as far from its thick, green places of hiding as possible. If Dinah should happen that way with a sketch-book!

But Dinah did not—the wood seemed untenanted by any human thing but themselves; but his guide never stopped until they had reached a “flat” where the white-oaks grew tall and far apart, and where none of the low bushes were.

“I don’t know what you’ll think,” she said, looking back at him—“this is some out of your way—but I don’t know what to think, either; an’ so I jest felt I *had* to tell someone, an’ there isn’t anyone but you.”

“Lennard is a good friend of yours,” he reminded her, generously.

“Yes, Bud—I mostly do go to him about things—he’s kind o’ older, an’ good to folks; but may be his idees ’bout religion won’t let him think jest right ’bout this here, so I’ve jest kept it from him, someway.”

She had seated herself on a fallen log, throwing back the apron from her face, and with a green spray of leaves was sheltering the baby’s eyes from the rays of the sun, while Mr. Edson arranged a comfortable couch in the leaves, at a respectful distance, and waited.

“I couldn’t speak back there,” she said, looking at him and nodding the way they had come. “I was afraid someone—*something* would hear me.”

“Something?”

She nodded, but did not speak; and her eyes, solemnly mysterious, brought him from his lazy attitude up into a sitting position.

“Well, Mrs. Daphne, would you just please tell me what it is you mean?”

"Do you—do you believe in ghosts?" was all the explanation he got.

"Ghosts?—well, I don't know;" and he would have laughed had he dared, but opposite her serious face it was not easy. "I might if I saw one, but the nearest approach I ever made to doing so was a night when I got lost, and a spirit I met in the woods led me back to the right road."

"That wasn't a ghost—that was me," she said, simply, ignoring the lightness of his speech; "but this is different, a heap different. Do you know—does the Bible own up to ghosts much?"

"Full of them," said Mr. Edson, with more decision than knowledge.

"Then if they come back in them days they kin now, I reckon," she said, resignedly; "an' that jest settles it."

"Who has been frightening you with ghost-stories?" he demanded.

"No, sir; nobody has," she protested. "Nobody knows about this one only me; but it's at our house—twice now—both times with a warning."

"Tell me all about it, you poor scared-to-death child! So that's why you are getting frightened at every step. What ghost have you seen?"

She covered her eyes with her hand for a moment; with all encouragement, it was not easy to tell.

"Sometimes—may be you've heard—we didn't get along well," she said, slowly, "an' once I run away—that was last year—an' then he promised some things on account of Edie; so when he went after me I come back again—that was jest before corn-plantin'. May be I hadn't ought to a gone—it wasn't right duty 'cordin' to the church" (and her listener felt like the veriest scamp as she humbled herself as if for his judgment); "but sometimes folks—specially if they ain't very good, anyway—they're like to

forget duties jest 'cause someone else does forget, too; an' may be some folks 'ud say its 'cause we had that trouble that he's comin' back now, an' so—"

"Who's coming back now?" he demanded; and she answered, almost in a whisper:

"Dick."

"Why—how can you—"

"Oh, don't think I'm crazy!" she said, pleadingly, dropping the hand from her face and looking at him; "I ain't. I wasn't giving any thought to such things first time. It's over a week now—at night—I was tellin' her—Granny—that I jest must go somewheres else to make a livin'—to the settlements, may be—an' she was against it, an' said I shouldn't take Edie; an' I was some worried, for she—she was makin' it so we couldn't move to Lennards, either. An' I was out a milkin' after dark, for our cows come home late; an' while I was at it, I made up my mind sure I'd jest go back across the line into Virginia again; an' jest then, out o' that laurel on the way to the spring, a warnin' come. Oh, it did!—it was his voice, an' I about dropped when I heard it; an' it said, slow an' careful, the words: '*If you go, I'll go after you; I'll bring you back jest like I did before.*'"

Whatever were the thoughts of Mr. Edson as father confessor, they lay too deep for words. He dropped back on his couch of leaves, with half-closed eyes, that nevertheless noted warily, pitifully, the earnestness in the wistful eyes. And when expression did come to him, it was in the form of music, beginning in the softest of contemplative whistles, and ending in a vocal rhythmical monologue about a Mr. McGinty and the bottom of the sea!

## CHAPTER XVII.

## ALONG THE LEDGE.

The lost soul for whom Krin was forming so doubtful a prayer stopped for a moment by the hot, sun-baked wall; but from within no sound came, and the desolation of the bare, treeless yard seemed doubly intensified when never a gleam of eyes gladdened the low door-way. Back there by the timber a blind sort of passion had made it possible for him to send her away knowing that for the rest of their lives friendly intercourse was over, but standing alone outside, the force of this new silence that was as one of the many deaths struck him with a meaning uncomprehended before, and sent him away aimless, but, like any other hurt animal, turning instinctively to the jungles.

Not even through the portion where paths led did he go, but turned square to the right, pushing through the crisp, rustling barricades of laurel, and then on—on over untraveled ways where the forest stretches unbroken through mountain after mountain.

The heat had penetrated even the shield of leaves raised against it; in every open space the more sensitive of the wood-plants were shriveled; the moss on old logs had turned from green to gold with the long, dry days. But of the heat from above, from below, the man was scarcely conscious; a fire within had burned something to death in his heart, and in the eyes and the brain the embers were yet smoldering. But if there is any comfort to be gained from motion, he was moving with a sort of desperation toward it.

The mountain! How he had loved her! How he had gone to her ever with his secrets, his questions, his confessions, to which no human ear opened! There were

nights of battle when he had lain on her cool bosom and caught whispers of patience from her lullabys of the starlight and the sure breaking of golden dawns, and now—

Is it not always at life's greatest need that words of comfort or hope fail utterly, the speakers standing far out of reach, as if aghast at the depth of their need. Just so that help of his boyhood—yes, of his manhood—drew out of reach of his need that day, just as our gods of earth ever do. Bear witness, any disciple of the heart's religion that men call love.

He crossed without noting it the course over which he had run only a few hours before, but the quest of then and the meeting with the man of the world were as things long past; they belonged on another side of his life—life, ever revolving, had turned with them into the shadows. Would the old dreams ever creep up awake again in some dawn of the future? Just now there was only the burning present, and under the weight of it he flung himself down where yawned a great crevice, whose end in either direction was only a thing of conjecture. A trifle of air seemed drawn through the long lane of it, and over him bent the thick green of Daphne's shelter. Without really seeking it, he had dropped down in as cool and shady a nook as could be found on the mountain that day.

But the beat or the break of a heart crowds out studies of still-life; and once having ceased bodily motion, he lay there in the dumb sort of stupor that follows some deaths in us. Whether it was minutes or hours that passed he could not have told, only the sun was not low; but from somewhere through the stagnation of thought into which he had crowded himself he was conscious of a peculiar odor that was drifting to him, and every now and then something so like a voice that he found himself waiting listlessly for it to come nearer, thinking it some passer-by on the mount-

ain. It came no nearer, just remained that murmur, murmur, as if from some distance; but something sharper, shriller, cut through the air and aroused him to surprise, at least. It was the rebellious yelp of a dog as when one is struck or trodden on, and it came up from that lane cleft through the rock. He arose then, quietly, and listened. Even the odor began to have an interest of its own as he walked first in one direction, then in another, to determine from which the sounds came. Then, searching for footing along the sheer walls, he at last slipped down a young birch and dropped, with a lightness strange in so large a man, to the ground below.

The ground was but layers of the leaves of innumerable seasons, making a thick carpet along the long, narrow alley, with its frequent cross-crevices that connected it with other alleys yet beyond. If any feet had passed over this one, they had been careful, for not a stir could he see traces of. From appearances, human feet might never have walked there since the days when Indians leaped those crevices; but those voices were not phantoms.

He could hear them plainer now, but the odor he had associated with them had disappeared, as if it floated only upward; and nowhere could he discover any entrance to the hidden room that must be very near—yet who knew the mountain and her secret places so much better than he?

On the other side of the ledge was where he decided the entrance was, but closer than that was some crevice through which the sounds came; and just yet, to hear them more clearly was object enough.

They were the voices of a man and a woman, and through one break in the stone wall he could hear most of their words, by listening very carefully. The voice of the man he did not know; that of the woman was not to be mistaken—it was the relict of the veteran Le Fevre.

The listener could find no place where he could get a view of them, the break in the wall was too devious and deep; but if he had, the picture there would surely have strengthened those old tales of witch-brews that had lent interest to the name of the lady within for many a year.

A shapeless sort of room, vast and shadowy, was lit dimly by some bluish streaks of daylight that seemed to come so long a distance they had forgotten the color of the sun. In some places the roof dipped very low, and a far-off drip, drip of water was heard. Where the roof was highest, a fire was burning on the stone floor—a fire of light sun-dried sticks that gave little smoke—and bending over it was Granny, shaking every now and then a piece of sheet-iron on which some peaches were scorching; and as soon as they were done to her taste they were dumped in a little heap on the floor, and her improvised griddle was again filled.

It was in stepping back for a fresh supply from a long bag in the shadows that her foot had come down on the white hound of that morning's chase, and his protest was the call that had aroused Bud.

"Curse the dog!" growled the man, who was using one end of the bag of peaches for a pillow. "I'd think you'd leave that company at home."

"I did. Someone was busy enough to untie him, though—I'll find out when I get home."

"May be her—his wife," suggested the man in the shadow. "You said she wanted to know where you stayed out in the hills. Will he track?"

"I'll go bail he will," returned Granny—"tracks rabbits in the daytime an' 'coons at night, an' never gets tied-up with them; but she hain't gumption enough to think o' trackin' with him—she's one o' the 'God bless ye! skeered-to-death' kind o' creeturs."



"Queer sort for *him* to pick up."

"Um!" assented the old lady. "Spite-work mostly, I reckon. There was another girl he'd run with—she belonged to your kentry settlements. They had a flare-up, an' she went a flirtin' with someone else, an' Dick was spunky—he wouldn't be left; he jest brought a wife home in short order, but made a bad bargain."

The man stretched himself drowsily at this not unusual love-story. He was a man of about middle age, black-bearded and lengthy, judging from the limbs reaching away into the shadows. The faint light outlined only his shoulders and the small magic circle where the mistress of ceremonies moved.

"Pity she ain't to be trusted," he said, at length; "she'd be a big help."

"Yes, she'd pray fer ye," said Granny—"that's all the way she'd help anyone out of a hole; an' then she'd hunt up the first psalm-singer that come along, an' get him to pray fer ye, too. Most o' the gospel folks hereabouts could scent a reward eal to Bach there."

The man muttered a curse, and turned restlessly on his pillow, giving Bach a stroke with one weighty hand that sent the hound slinking to the end of its rope away from him.

"What's your call for a spite at that there dog?" demanded Mrs. Le Fevre. "He hain't pesterin' you any. Jest let 'im be. Did you get that logwood last night?"

"It's there with them jugs an' the candy. Is he goin' to sleep all day?"

Granny did not trouble herself to reply, but lit a bit of stick from the meagre fire and moved over into an alcove where there was gathered and heaped a curious assortment of things. Three barrels were ranged along the wall of it, one covered; a newly killed pig was stretched there stark and

white, and some ham-bones that were stripped. The old lady held her light high above one of the barrels, peering into it's black depths; then dipping a jug in it, she raised it, when the swallowing gurgles told her it was half-filled, and bringing it, together with some paper packages, she seated herself on the stone floor and began untying them.

"Done burning peaches?" queried the man, as if questioning through sheer distaste of that underground silence, and not through interest. "You hain't used half."

"Don't allow to; there's enough in that pile to color all the spirits you can tote, I'll be bound. I'm aimin' to take the rest home, little at a time, after you light out."

"What'll she say?"

"Pooh!" and Granny's scorn was supreme. "She's fool enough to believe I picked 'em off hazel-bushes ef I told her so—leastways, ef she don't believe she don't say so. She'll jest set an' look at ye like the devil. Some folks' looks," added the old lady, contemplatively, "are jest the hardest things about 'em to deal with; she's one 'o them kind."

"She's got good looks," contested the man; and a contemptuous snort was the only reply given.

"Well, she has," he went on, "and I'll bet other folks know it—that city chap, for one. I overheard him talkin' to her out at that fence last week. Not that they was sayin' so much, but he was lookin' at her as if she was peaches and cream; an' I don't reckon she's got many ideas of her own when he speaks."

To the listener, every word came. He drew back a little. There are some things even the strongest men can not face immovable. When he heard their voices again, they were speaking of the man with whom Dick had had trouble.

"Ain't out of danger yet," said the stranger. "If he goes under it would be manslaughter."

"Mighty little difference what they call it," decided the old lady, briefly—"it's settled fer Dick."

"Say," continued the stranger, "ain't that man Lennard to be trusted in a pinch? Dick told me some about him when I first met him—how he histed him out of the window away from the sheriff, and all. I tell you what we need here now, Granny, is a man's help to get off this cursed mountain, and across south. I'm bound to strike for Tennessee, or down that way, if we only had a man we could trust to borrow money from. This way of sneakin' a jug of whisky at a time down the mountain ain't giving us but mighty little ahead. We need a ten-strike."

"Can't make it off Bud. He hasn't gumption enough to make money—does too much work for folks that can't pay prices. Some ways he's to be trusted, an' some ways he ain't. Him an' me had a fallin' out t'other day at the forge, an' it's too hard tellin' how to take him to run risks this time. He's donated your meat this week; that ought to satisfy you;" and Granny wound up with a laugh that silenced the stranger.

She had opened the largest paper package and displayed several pounds of the cheaper grade of candies. Every now and then she would take a generous bite that showed her own liking for sweets, but over half of it she was dropping into the large-bodied, narrow-throated jug.

"That bar'l o' rain-water's most gone," she announced, "an' little sign o' gettin' it full again. No rain-water, no spirits."

The man grumbled something in condemnation of the mountain, it's temperature, and general unfitness for any sort of an existence.

"Dick told me it was safe as a jail for hiding out in," he grumbled. "Lord! if I've got to live in this dungeon many more weeks, I'll break back into jail to get away from it."

His disgust had little effect on Granny; evidently she was used to it.

"But you'll not go jest yet, my lad," she said, in a sinister way. "I'll see to it that ye get no one else in trouble by changing your mind."

"What would you do?" he demanded. "And when you grin like that, you look devilish enough for anything."

Granny grinned a little more at the compliment, and wrapped up the rest of the candy. "Ye'll not be movin' afore I get back, anyway," she said; "an' that'll be in the mornin'. The herbs I'm out after must always be picked afore the dew's off;" and cackling at her own clever subterfuge, she gathered up her staff and her bonnet. "It's gettin' along in the day, an' it's no short walk," she concluded. "You untie Bachelor."

The man proceeded to do so, with some words of warning about the dog following next time.

"And if you go out past that well-spring, keep your wits about you," he advised. "I came near breaking my neck over that ledge last night. It's an ugly place; be careful you don't make a misstep."

Granny laughed tauntingly. "That's 'case you're green to the mountain, that ye can't keep on yer feet. The mountain always has tricks fer greenhorns."

The man outside listened no longer. He had little idea which way Granny was likely to turn, through those alleys in making her exit, or—and this was more to the point—which way Bachelor would turn. No good was to be gained from their knowing their "still" was discovered. Not even an honest "still," either; for the mention of the ingredients used told him that the "spirits" manufactured there had never the juice of the corn in them, but was a crude concoction of chemicals and simple vegetable additions that the wisdom of the mountain had some fame for producing.

But their traffic had no interest to the man who listened. A strange presence on the mountain had disturbed him until he had located it; but now that he knew where neighbors' goods were disappearing to in a mysteriously nocturnal way, his interest was over. He would warn them that the thieving must cease. They must leave, whoever they were. He would tell Granny so, but not to-day. He wanted to get away from voices; most of all, voices that would want answers. Even the forest in this its least sympathetic mood was better than people. He had seen too many people to-day.

If he had counted them, he had seen but two; but in some strange manner they and their influences had been doubled many, many times. Words and voices of them seemed filling all the universe known to him—they were crowding him out of his world.

Once he looked back after leaving the ledge, but no sign of the white hound or its mistress met him; she was evidently going down the ravine farther before beginning the climb over the rocks. The man had mentioned the well-spring; he knew where that was. The water leaped up between two great slabs of stone and formed the head of a run through the basin; so it was past it they found the door to their shelter. Well, he would warn them away—to-morrow.

Granny was right—it was getting along in the day. The sun was dropping low and lengthening the waving shadows of things; his own loomed up before him fatefully. Would he never be able to walk it down? Suppose one's shadow was a conscious thing! What terror the idea would bring at times—the times when one forgets the guardian angels and the all-seeing Power that rules; forgets all that can not be seen with the bodily sense of sight! But the shadow—the shadow is never gone; it dims sometimes, but never

dies away. Suppose it knew all, felt all of the life that formed it! Might there be shadows of thought, of impulses, of desires, that fell just so on some sward beyond human ken, laid there in clear outline by the light of a sun that shone on minds and souls? And did they pass just so, and drift among the forgotten things they touched; or was there somewhere recorded to one's credit those shades of immaculate yearnings that touch the spirit at times, and then are driven back by the force of the body? What of all the strivings for good that there must be in the world of which the world knows nothing, because it faints in the strife for lack of strength, and the good reached for is never clasped?

Is it only deeds we will be weighed by in the scales of eternal justice? Then what of the mighty battles of good and evil in the heart that end in lethargy? Do the lances of right that we strove to carry catch never a gleam of light on their tips as they fall from our striving, but weak, hands?

Does the recording angel lay on the book only the strokes of black and the strokes of white to our credit? If so, it would take but a small page to hold the record of a soul—for half-tones are the covering of lives. In places, the shadows may grow deeper; in others, the gray melt into a whiter light. Our fairest deeds may have grown from some selfishness, our darkest be the result of some strife for good that failed; and how is all that to be balanced in that book of life? Questions! questions!

To be sure, he had asked them all before, with only himself to answer them; they had drifted among the half-forgotten things, and then some trifle would lead him back on the old lines. There were the chosen people of the Lord, why should they have been exalted above their brethren? There was the bodily rising of the Christ from the tomb that

he had tried to reason himself into, and had only pushed himself far away from; there was the final judgment given from the pen of that angelic scribe. How had he got back to that question again? Oh, yes, it was in the track of that shadow—the shadow that would know all if it was conscious; the shadow that—what if people were their own recording angels! What if each act, good or bad, every atom of thought or action, every impulse and endeavor, left its own track on our souls!—a track we can no more free ourselves from than from our shadow that clings. What if that lesson of life in the seed and the fruit were duplicated in unaccountable ways. What if each unseen, unacted impulse, for either good or bad, were a grain dropped in the furrows of a soul. We forget them, and leave them in the darkness, and pass on; but in the darkness things grow. Under the snow the roots of things live through the longest winters. The planter forgets, but never the seed. Its fruit, good or bad, is an aid to the development of the thing undefinable—the spirit to which we belong.

That idea, fragmentary and elusive, but ever recurring, seemed suddenly to open a great vista through which light streamed on him—a light of insight he had walked to through that shadow. It might be but transitory—a phase of fancy, such as sometimes drifts between some sorrow and us, and lures one into overleaping all that is pain just now, showing us some vast possibilities of soul that will raise us above the human aches of the heart.

But he did not think of that. He only knew that a bit of glory had crept into his darkened mind.

He took off his hat and glanced up through the tall columns where the sky shone golden. "I feel like saying 'Thank God' for it, an' then—then I don't know but what it's jest myself that drew it to me through a long hunt—

me an' the little bit o' God in me that reaches for the light again. Will it come back to me? And when it does, will she know, too, and understand, and never look afraid of me?"

For no conception of the supreme life came to him without the thought of another soul sharing it—one his own reached out to as father and lover and child.

A too fleshly idea of heaven?—but no stream can rise higher than its source. Many freer from environments of thought than he are just pagan enough to have no desire for a heaven beyond an abode in the place where their love is.

"She'll know then—an' understand," he whispered, with almost a smile in his eyes. The "then" seemed very distant; but one must have some hope to guide a ship by, though we never draw it closer to us than the horizon.

He was in the clear woods now, away from bush and rock. His feet were taking him where they would; his thoughts were of other things than his course. He was walking slowly, quietly, but all at once his drooped head was raised. He was not conscious of hearing anything, but he was conscious of not being alone. One must be bred in the timber to know that unexplainable feeling with which the unseen presence of an embodied spirit touches us—a certain narrowing and closening of the wide, speechless vistas.

Standing motionless, he discovered within gunshot the reason of the feeling—a man and a woman seated under the white-oaks. Sometimes for weeks he could pass over the mountain and meet no human thing, but to-day at every turn he saw faces and heard voices; the forest had never seemed so small.

He heard no voices this time, and their backs were to him; her head was bent and her hand covered her eyes. When it was taken away, it was the man who did it; he



reached over and took the hand in his, saying something that from his manner one would think could only be lover-like; evidently a question, for she nodded her head, and after a little, still holding her hand, he helped her to rise.

His eyes were very tender, could the watcher but have seen them. He felt them instead, though standing afar off, and their feeling went to the heart of him.

"You poor child," the man beside her was saying; "you must fret yourself no more. You *shall* leave. It is all some miserable trick of that old woman; but you shall slave for her no longer. I will see—"

Just then, with his hand yet on her arm, he glanced up and saw a short distance away a figure there was no mistaking. For the second time that day it arose like an apparition before him in the forest, but this time there was neither haste nor embarrassment in the manner of the mountaineer—nothing unusual, unless it was a certain pallor; but he came straight to them. Scarcely seeming to see Krin, he spoke to Edson.

"I forgot all about the work you wanted done at the forge," he said. "I'll go back along now an' do it, if it ain't too late."

"It will be late, but no matter," answered Don, his face flushing a little. Of course, his being there with Krin was all right, but the very way in which Bud ignored the meeting so unusual made him feel ill at ease. And then he added: "It has been too hot to work, anyway. We—I thought it would be cooler up here."

"Not likely to be cool any place till the moon changes again. It changed yesterday in the mornin'—that's a warm change, too; an' it's apt too keep at this heat till the next change."

"Is the moon your sign for weather on the mountain?"

"Mostly; we hain't any better one. It's true, the moon

is. I've heard tell of folks who could read things by the stars, but I never could do that. I look and look, and get to know jest where they all belong, but they don't tell things to most folks like the moon."

They were walking together, the three, through the long shadows. The child, awake now, raised it's head at the sound of Bud's voice, and struggled toward him. He looked at Krin, and without a word she reached the little one to him.

"She seems to know you well," remarked Don, as the child nestled so contentedly in his arms; and the man's eyes were very tender as he looked down.

"She does," he said. "When she was sick she got some petted on me; they do that sometimes, you know; and I'll miss her powerful, for awhile, when I'm gone."

"Gone? *You're* going away?" And Don looked at him in surprise. "Well, I'd miss you powerful, too, if you did that. Isn't the idea rather sudden?"

"No, I reckon not;" and the low evenness of the man's voice never wavered. "May be I never mentioned it to you, but I aimed to leave once before, two years back, and then there was things to keep me—sickness an' such; but I ain't needed bad now, an' I reckon I'll be a going."

"Not needed! Why, I would try and make it worth while for you to stay, if—"

"You couldn't," answered the other, briefly, and took the lead where the path was narrow. He may have realized that the speech was strangely blunt, from the silence that followed it, for after a little he added: "No, sir; there is life beyond this mountain, an' it's natural enough a man would want to see something of it, and my time seems to have come. I reckon I'll come back sometime. I wouldn't want to die away from the mountain. I always had that notion;" and he glanced back with a sort of apologetic

smile for the weakness, and then asked suddenly: "Do you ever look ahead till you seem to see the time your life's to be over? I mean, does there come a year when you can't see or plan or imagine yourself living after that year?"

Don nodded. "Yes, when I used to hear the old saying that 'whom the gods love die young,' I was convinced I should never be let live for old age; but here I am."

"Who said that, and what gods did they mean?"

Mr. Edson always tried to keep clear of the discussions theological, in which he never seemed to do himself any credit, though he knew he was expected to by these ridiculously earnest believers and doubters; but anything away from their own book of faith he was not so much afraid of.

"Oh, the gods of the Greeks. You should have lived in their day, Lennard. They were all out-of-door divinities; the moon and the winds and the sun were each some divine spirit, to say nothing of the flowers and trees. I forget most of them, but this"—and he picked up a late violet from among the leaves—"this, they held, was colored by the blood of one of the many gods who died of love; and the pine-tree there, they held, was inhabited by his soul—Atys, I think it was. For some reason, the higher powers would not give back his life, but decreed that his cloak should be ever green; and do you not know how the pine moans? That is for freedom, perhaps."

He was speaking lightly, but his listeners were earnest ones; it was a bit of new religion to them, and, seeing it, he added: "One of those old Greek histories of their religion would just be the thing you would like, Lennard. They had their ideas of the spirits in different birds; one, for eaves-dropping, was changed to an owl that could see only at night. The goddess Daphne was changed into this," and he touched the laurel, "to hide her from—"

He stopped abruptly; he was about to say "her lover," totally forgetful for the moment of the suggestiveness touching the legend and his own application of it to this other Daphne—this sprite of the wood that fate had set in unfitting, prosaic surroundings. Krin had raised her head and was looking at him eagerly, questioningly.

"Oh!" she breathed, with a little air of comprehension, "you meant that, an' I never knew."

"In fact, there is no end to those transformations of theirs," he went on, hastily. "For bad acts people were given a life in some animal, an evil bird, or some sort of tree that would go through death every year; while for good ones, of course, they were given a life in some beautiful thing, and made immortal and all that."

"An' it's all wrote—in a book?" asked the Pagan, slowly; "all that—an' men in other places have been knowing it all their lives, an' no one ever told me before."

"Well, you see, it's just an old, forgotten religion; people don't think of it as a religion at all any more, only just a string of pretty stories, like fairy-tales."

"I reckon it's some more than that," decided the other, thoughtfully. "It may be it ain't all truth, but there's like to be *some* truth back of it, jest like other religion that ain't old an' forgotten. May be, now, some o' them in the churches will jest be like pretty stories to people in hundreds of years, when folks know enough to pick out the good and live by it; an' may be they'll find good in the old as well as the new, then. I'll get one o' them books."

Krin gave a quick little sigh, a sigh near akin to a sob, for the day had left her worn and tired. And of what use were her prayers against this determined will of his to turn to the false beliefs? For of course they were false, though pretty. Mr. Edson, of course, meant no harm; but she would have chosen to remain ignorant, even of the puzzling

Daphne, rather than have had Bud hear of those many gods—her own poor brain was so sadly beset to understand the ways of one.

Little more was said. Once, in crossing an unusually rough place, Don offered his hand to her, and meeting her eyes, fancied there was something pleading and reproachful there.

"Trust me," he said, in a low voice, his thoughts given to her superstitious fears, and wishing to reassure her as to his own secrecy, and his intent to free her in some way from the machinations that he had no doubt were of Mother Le Fevre's weaving.

And the man ahead, hearing only the words, bent his face lower over the child's, drawing it close, as one draws a shield, feeling it might be the last time he would carry her so. He gave her to Krin, in silence, when they reached the place where the paths divided.

"I may bring someone else over to see you to-morrow—a lady," said Don, with a certain significance in his manner. She looked at him and nodded, and then spoke to Bud—not looking at him at all.

"Are you leaving the mountain soon?" she asked.

"To-morrow."

It was the first time they had addressed each other, and without another word the girl walked into the house and shut the door.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CONFESSION.

Edson was the first to break the silence as they walked down to the forge together. "You were likely surprised to meet Mrs. Le Fevre (how that stuck in his throat) and me out there?"

"Some," was the laconic reply.

"Well, I'm glad it was you rather than anyone else, on her account," went on Don, brazenly, annoyed at the man's suggestive, unpleasant silence. "And you saw, I suppose, she had been crying, too?"

No answer at all to that.

"Well, she was," he went on, desperately; "and I know how the whole thing looks to anyone else. But she—she's in trouble, poor child! I don't know just why she turns to me; never imagined I was cut out for a comforter! But she needs someone;" and then he said, bluntly: "It seems to me you two are not the friends you used to be; yet you never seemed to me like a man to draw away from anyone just when they got where they needed friends worst."

That shot seemed to tell.

"She hasn't any need for me, or she'd let me know, and I'd be there," he said; "and if she wanted me to know what troubles her, she'd tell me that, too. So you needn't mind about me. She's turned to you first on account of religion—that's natural; and all you've got to do is to see that she ain't ever sorry. I heard some men once speaking about you and women folks. May be they lied; but I don't want to find they're right, or that you'd ever make her be sorry."

"Why, look here! Confound it!" burst out Don, with a very much flushed face. "You talk as if I might be some scoundrelly adventurer making love to her—to *her*! Good God! She is like a lily growing in slime here, and I don't know a man that's fit to even think of her. She is only a child, after all, a child with a soul like a crystal."

The other man listened, with his eyes on the ground—eyes that seemed to need rest so sadly.

"That's all right," he said, slowly; "your thoughts are all right, I reckon. If I didn't think it, I'd not be so quick about

leaving the mountain, may be. She won't come to me for any help any more, 'count o' me having no religion. Kind o' 'fraid, she seems; an' may be it's natural. But she turned to you becuse you *have*; and—and sence her thoughts are jest bound up in you, you'll be good to her?"

"You're crazy!" was the only reply Don could make, he was so staggered at the calm, serious statement; and his heart seemed to give a great leap at the crazy man's fancy.

"No," said Bud, firmly. "I've seen it all along; a makin' her more an' more set against everybody's ways but yourn. She needs someone who thinks about her jest like you say; someone she thinks is good. She thinks a heap o' goodness, Corinny does; more especial 'case she's always had to live so far off of it. It's always the thing that's furthest off that we want most," he added, with logical certainty.

"But you're mistaken about—"

"No, I ain't;" and Don wondered a little at the sullen, decided doggedness of the man. "She's been a heap different sence that day she heard you a singing. She's kind o' had religion ever sence that, and kind o' more scarey about folks that don't have it. I've counted it all up—I see how it all is; so you needn't, either of you, try to hide it from me any longer. And when I'm gone away—"

"See here, Bud, I want an agent—an overseer—here in case—in case I should not be here all the time. The place is open for you, if you'll take it."

"The mountain's getting too narrow. I feel some like I'm smothering on it these days. I'm going away."

They had reached the forge, where Edson's horse was pawing impatiently, tired of the long wait for his master; and his master resaddled him, with a sense of being very close to some whirlwind of feeling that he wanted to get away by himself to think over.

"I'll miss you," was all he could think of to say.

"Yes," agreed the other; and then, after a little, he added, "But you'll have a heap on the mountain that I never could a got. Folks like you, not knowing why, hardly. 'Tain't so much what you do as what you seem to *be* that draws folks, and makes folks believe in you; and that's a heap o' help to a man. And I think, if you don't mind, I'll ask you to-morrow to keep some papers for me—same as if I might die away; so that if I did my house will be give where I want it to go—to Corinny."

"But you're likely to outlive me, you know," protested Don.

"I reckon not," was the placid reply. "I never could, all my life, see any further ahead of me than to thirty years old. I'm about that now, I reckon; and it's time to make plans."

"I believe," said Don, looking at him with keener eyes—he had been too much absorbed by one especial revelation made to notice very closely the bearer of it—"I believe you have simply got a morbid fit that is sending you away. Come, now, own up—tell me what's the matter. Why won't you stay on here?"

The man, who was gathering up some tools, finished putting them in a bag that lay there before he answered.

"You mightn't like it if I told you," he said; "or you mightn't be agreed to take my things in charge for her, or for anyone who needs them bad, if she don't."

"Nonsense! I give you my word to do anything you ask in that line without knowing your reasons. Fix up your papers—I'll be over at noon to-morrow; but I acknowledge I'd like to know the 'why' of it all."

"Well"—and the curious, sad eyes of the man rather avoided the frank ones of his questioner—"if I don't go, may be I'll do worse. When a man knows jest how weak he is, he is that much stronger than if he didn't know it;



and that's jest all the strength I have to-day, sir. I know some things I can't face here any longer, an' I'm a going."

"But that ain't giving me a real reason."

"May be not; but I shouldn't be surprised if you found out some day without me having to tell you. I'll have the papers ready, sir, to-morrow."

And for the second time that day Mr. Edson watched the Pagan walk away from him, leaving a host of chaotic thoughts behind.

"I guess the hill people are right about his mental state," was the charitable conclusion arrived at. "Solid, reliable about work, and all that, but the queer fancies and morbid streaks in him are just about on the dividing-line of lunacy—harmless lunacy, I hope, for the sake of that mesmerism in his eyes; but what—what of that other idea?"

The "other idea" kept with him all along the gorge, that was growing dusk far in advance of the hill-tops. The excuse of lunacy was not so ready to his aid, knowing, perhaps, that it was not wanted.

"It is ridiculous, it is altogether ridiculous," he repeated, until the words lost their meaning, and he said them as an accompaniment to a memory that was not ridiculous to him at all—the memory of her eyes as she had said that day: "You're so good—so powerful good—it's not so hard to tell the troubles to you. It's like folks feel, I reckon, when they go to priests and tell their sins, like I hear some do. Yes, I reckon it comforts them jest as it does me."

"And all because I happened to sing a hymn instead of a 'walk-around,'" he told himself. That fellow is right—it is not what I do, but what I seem, that wins me friends. Yet I don't try to cheat people—myself excepted."

But no striking into side questions could keep him long away from the one rather absorbing fancy of the Pagan's. The Pagan himself and his speedy departure drifted into

the background. At any other time the affairs of the day would have led him into wary suspicion, after Pap's discoveries and the mark on the boot, and of it; but even the ghost of the Ledge had dwindled to insignificance—the weakest of schemes to frighten that poor girl into staying with the old woman.

"But she sha'n't," was one of his decisions that startled him a little when put into words—it had such an air of proprietorship about it.

Someway, all his own vague, intangible fancies leaped into form and speech when he heard that "ridiculous" idea put into words by someone else. It had raised the corner of a veil, and the vision that he had laughed himself into disbelieving stood close and raised wistful, half-adoring eyes to him, and he knew that he could never laugh them away again. What matter the errors of speech that were the outgrowth of association—there was never an error of thought in the white soul of her. No association could soil that; and conscious of many a smirch on his own soul that had never cried aloud to him before, he bowed in a sort of veneration to this isolated, untainted child-mother. And if she cared—well, everything seemed within range of the possible if that was so. But Dinah!

He had for one full hour, at least, forgotten the existence of Dinah—forgotten all worldly interests or opinions.

"I shall fight shy of the seniors until I know if that green-eyed monster is a reliable guesser," was the decision that followed the remembrance of Dinah; "but Di herself—I may as well prepare for all sorts of ridicule, if nothing worse—but Dinah, in all fairness, has got to know first."

But when face to face with Dinah his usual freedom of speech limped sadly; and she was looking so pretty, so bright, so evidently content with her own state of existence, that he could only look at her, turning phrase after

phrase over in his mind as a beginning, and could not begin at all.

The moon was full—the “warm” moon of Bud’s prophesy; and to make his endeavor more difficult by a leaning toward sentiment, Miss Dinah proposed after tea that they adjourn to the veranda. The veranda, of all places!—a trellis-shadowed, honeysuckle-scented bower of a retreat—one where no doubt many a love-whisper had been told through many a summer.

“No, it is not so much cooler here than in the sitting-room,” she agreed, “but there are two already in there; if we remained, we might be two too many.”

“How so?”

“Just take a peep through the window and answer yourself,” suggested the young lady.

“Well”—after that had been done—“the seniors are getting out the card-table—that is, Miss Lottie is; and Uncle looks, for all his gouty foot, as if he was enjoying life.”

“Exactly. It will be whist until bed-time; it was reading aloud to each other until tea-time; it was Auntie doing a sketch in water-colors of him until dinner-time. In fact, they have been two and I have been one all day long.”

“What!”

“I know you have no idea of being rude when you shout into my ear after that fashion. Nevertheless, it is a little trying to delicate nerves,” and from her pained expression one would think her own nerves were in the last stage of decay; “but, forgiving you, allow me to say that my own varied experience always furnishes me with a key to such all-absorbing games of whist.”

“I do wish you would be serious. What puts that absurd idea into your head?”

“I told you, did I not?” she asked, looking up at him, half-laughing, half-watchful—“my knowledge of human

nature, gleaned from an experience wider than my future husband might relish. Is that serious enough?"

"In a way; but it tells me nothing."

"And I don't mean it to," she said, laughing outright. "I have lived long enough to know better. There is nothing to tell you about those children in there," and she nodded toward the window. "They are still in the sublime innocence of ignorance, and don't know what ails them. They have an idea that wedded bliss is the most correct thing in life, and immediately began by getting a yoke ready for us. One good turn deserves another. Don, we ought to reciprocate."

Here seemed at last one opening, and he leaped into it. "Oh, but don't you think, Di, that people should arrange affairs of that sort themselves? Outside parties so seldom understand—"

"Our outside parties did," she corrected. "Just see how beautifully they mated us—so much better than we could have done alone;" and receiving no answer, she added, "Don't you agree, dear?"

And though he did not speak, he could not keep his head from nodding assent, even feeling that the nod was taking him into deeper water.

"Why do you jump up and tramp along the porch like that?" she said, complainingly. "Thought you said you were tired. Come, sit down here comfortably, and tell me how the mountain has fared since your three days' absence. Did that Gannymede lead you to your goddess? Has she married Vulcan yet? And how does the saw-mill get along?"

He stopped in his walk then, but did not take the seat beside her, standing, instead, with his back to the honeysuckle trellis, and so facing her.

"You don't care a particle about all those things," he

said, slowly, with a belated acuteness. "You are talking against time for some reason to-night; and your eyes are as bright as the stars—or a fever."

"What a finale to a compliment!" and then, with a comical professional air, she felt her own pulse. "No, not a fever; quite regular, thank you! And you are mistaken. I am interested in Vulcan, who has taken the place of the handsomest man I've seen in the mountains. How is his Paganship?"

"All right"—he had resumed his walk again—"he leaves the mountain to-morrow."

"Oh! then Venus has said 'no,' has she?"

"I can not understand your reason for coupling her personality with his or any other man's," he returned, rather stiffly. "It is altogether uncalled for."

"By you," she completed, and her smile was a bit sardonic. "But you see I am seeking for some bit of romance to wind up our summer with. Our own affair has been too prosaic. Vulcan and Daphne are my last hope."

"And I do not believe you ever heard them exchange words with each other," he said, impatiently. That impossible jest of hers always annoyed him.

"No, but I did see him look at her once."

"Oh, yes; and you do see a couple playing whist in there, too!" he remarked, derisively; "and you build flimsy fabrications on that foundation. You would be a host in yourself at gathering up material for a romance writer. Didn't you promise to keep notes of the mountain for your friend March?"

"He is your friend, too."

"Well, yes, I hope so;" and then, after a turn or so on the veranda, "Yes, I do hope so. I liked that fellow, you know. Wish he had spent the summer with us, instead of going West. He is a good companion."

"So he is," she agreed, carelessly. "And, by the way, Don, he is coming back here—a letter in to-day's mail says so."

"To you?"

She nodded. "Sends regards to you; says he has struck some bonanza of luck out there, and asks if you have any shares yet for sale in your coal and lumber schemes."

"Tell him to come on," he returned, gloomily. "I might donate to him all my gains of this summer, and then not make him rich. What are you laughing at?"

"Well," she said, straightening her lips with an effort, "considering that I am one of the gains—or in balancing your accounts will I be footed up among the losses?"

"If I lose you;" and the tinge of impatience in his tones only seemed to amuse her the more.

"But you can't," she returned. "My aunt and your uncle will prevent it. I tell you what you might do, though, and rid your shoulders of a responsibility—you might give me away."

"Humph!"—his thoughts were so far afield again that her chatter was half-unheeded—"to whom?"

"I do believe," she laughed, "that you can't conceive of anyone wanting me. What a lover, Don! I wish you would just tell me why you helped them elect me to be Mrs. Edson."

He checked his restless promenade quickly enough then. He was at his wits' end how to approach that very subject, and she had plunged into it without the slightest hesitation.

"Why did you?" he retorted.

"Well, it is a delicate thing to do—refusing a man right before folks, a man you always liked, too. And when you're so dazed that you know you'd do it brutally if you did it at all, it is so much easier just to keep silence until you have a better chance."

With an inarticulate sort of exclamation, he was beside her.

"If you had spoken at all, would you have refused me?" And his voice was so intense, so commanding, that for an instant the laughter was driven from her eyes. "Tell me!"

"Well, I will," she promised, "if you will try and look a degree less ferocious. You have been so stupendously lover-like ever since, that it was still a delicate subject to approach; but to-night you are different, and so—"

"Go on."

"But there is nothing more to say, is there?" she asked. "I am sure I twisted the fingers nearly off you as a hint for you to raise objections that day—if you wanted to—and—"

"And I didn't, because I was a conceited fool," he burst out. "Lord, Di! you've no idea what a fool I was. So that is why you pressed my hand? You darling!"

And if the match-makers at the whist-table had seen the decided way in which Miss Dinah was clasped for a moment in Don's arms, their souls would have rejoiced at the success of their plan.

"For mercy's sake, let me go, Don!" whispered that young lady, in a rather smothered way; "and don't you dare kiss me again! You have utterly lost your wits on the witchy side of the mountain!"

But when the proprieties were again in command, it was no gloomy-faced person who stalked back and forth, with at every turn his eyes resting on the misty height of the other mountain. He was free once more in every sense—he, who had never before realized how much it meant—that freedom! and he would use it now with little care for the world or its opinion. What duty so strong anywhere as the right to care for that child whose life had been so sad?

And she had turned to him as to a priest ! Was it in love? Was it—

"I declare, Don, I never realized how insignificant I was until you showed your exuberance at getting rid of me," complained Dinah; "it is really one of the most humiliating things I can remember."

"Nothing of the sort. Do you suppose I wanted you against your will?" he demanded, with a fine show of unselfishness—never a word of his own fruitless attempt to do the thing she had done so easily. "Not a bit of it; and of course I had to kiss you for being such a frank, good girl."

"Of course," she agreed, with a quizzical glance up at him; "that is one of your redeeming traits, isn't it?—a rule never to let goodness go unappreciated. The trouble is, though, that a man is so likely to be misunderstood by people too unsophisticated to comprehend only the philanthropy and rise above the personal feelings. Now, with the good girls of the mountain, for instance, don't you think a nice Christmas-card, or a pound of candy—"

"Go on ! I don't mind the ridicule to-night," he confessed. "Since I have lost you, I can bear the lesser evils of life somehow."

She only laughed and slipped her arm through his, and stood looking over the valleys and the far hills that seemed swathed in a great peace; and out of the blue-gray billows the witched mountain arose like a sovereign, with just a trifle of mist that lay on its brow like a crown.

"I am going with you to-morrow if you ride over there," she decided. "I will not stay here alone and become permeated by sentiment through the seniors—a sentiment needing just that lame foot and this isolation for its cultivation. If they had remained in town among people they would, perhaps, never have got so near each other as those



games of whist have brought them. Yes, I will be charitable enough to leave them alone and go with you. Tomorrow will be a long day, anyway."

He did not ask why; but if he had, would have learned that it was because of an arrival the following day would bring, and might have learned, also, that a letter tucked close in Miss Dinah's bodice was accountable for much of that young lady's prowess in shirking so lightly the bonds laid on them by the seniors for life.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### A WARNING.

But the serenity of the mountain in the moonlight belied the life on it, just as many another serene visage does, for there were strange moving figures through its glens and gulches, loud calls from hunters, and shots fired that brought back only their own echoes; and at Riker's the children, who persisted in being wakeful and curious, were told to lie still in the trundle-bed and go to sleep; that it was just Gran Le Fevre had strayed off and got lost on the mountain.

"Naw, sir-ee!" confided little Jake to his nearest neighbor under the patch-work quilt—"naw, sir; 'tain't Granny, I know. Couldn't lose her on this here mountain. I don't know who 'tis, but 'tain't Granny."

"What call they got to tell that for, then?" was the whispered query that Jacob could not answer; "'tain't any o' our folks, an' 'tain't Krin, 'cause she's here. Reckon it's Bud?"

A snort of contempt gave that question its due, and the speaker was pacified.

"Tain't anyone we set store by, then; an' I'm goin' asleep."

But little Jake did not; the instincts of the hunter answered in him to the sound of every shot that echoed down the valley. He heard his mother say it was one o'clock; and failing to persuade Krin to lie down, she herself did so, without undressing, not knowing what moment the men might come back with news.

He peeped again and again at the figure that sat there by the window so still, so silent, that he thought she had gone asleep at times; but she had not, for once, when a halloo of some man was heard nearer, she raised her head and listened. He wished she would stir around a little more. Once he ventured to whisper:

"Say, Krin, is it Granny?"

But Becky Ann, who was not yet asleep, forestalled an answer by ordering him to keep quiet and not waken the rest. But it was a fidgety quietude; all the more so because of that figure at the window that did not fidget. In some way he got to thinking that her face in the moonlight looked like Addy's face as he had seen it last, and that was more than he could endure and lie still. From the bed a heavy breath sounded—Becky Ann was off guard—and a soft whisper arose from the trundle-bed:

"You turn your face t'other way; I'm goin' to get up."

Krin automatically paid that tribute to the proprieties, and having adjusted one garment satisfactorily, he slid up beside her.

"I'll bet it'll be Bud finds her first," he said, determined to converse whether she would or no. "Which trail did he start on?"

"None," she said, wearily; "he hasn't heard."

"Sho! I'd take the wood if I wa'n't skeered o' the ghosts; did you know I seen one?"

She nodded, scarce heeding.

"Mam tell ye?" He waited a reasonable time for an answer, and then went on. "Well, I did, sure 'nough. Say, what was that Pap Keesy was tellin' Ike Dumphey 'bout Bud an' Granny's white houn'? Didn't you hear? Sho! they was right by the window."

Failing to arouse interest or answers, he slipped out at the open door into the warm night. The moon had crossed the center of the sky, and with his sharp ears alert he tried to tell by distant muffled calls just what "flat" or what "rise" the hunters were on, and longed, boy-fashion, for some of the blood-hounds of old war-legends. How quick he would learn the hiding-places of everything on the mountain—barring ghosts!

The moon dropped lower and lower. After awhile, two men came down from the mountain and halted out at the chip-yard, talking in low tones.

"Well, Denny," said one—it was Will Riker—"I don't know what Pap's word would go for in the court house, but blamed if I'd believe him on oath. Then he's got a spite at Bud."

"There's more than Pap Keesy's sayin's," argued the other. "Didn't Dick's woman own up quick as could be that Bud took that houn' away? Well, that houn' hain't showed up sence—no more has Granny; and if anyone did harm by her they'd have to quiet him, too, or he'd lead the way right to her. I ain't set against Bud bad, though you can't expect too much that's good from a man that owns he's a heathen. My wife, she's always allowed some such an end would come of him."

Riker sat down on a log and dropped his gun beside him.

"Well, I don't want any better neighbor than he is, anyway," was his rather worried summing up of the case. "And

I ain't believin' a word o' this stuff till I hear him own up. Now that's me!"

"You wouldn't do for a jury, nohow," remarked Denny, with an eye to the profit derived from that source. "Now I hain't anything against nor for him; but I've a notion," and his voice was dropped a trifle—"I've a notion Dick's wife's got her suspicions."

"Naw, she ain't," contradicted Riker. "They're good friends enough. Them words he had with Granny, over the forge, didn't change Krin any. She says Bud was in the right of it, an' that Granny wanted about four times the worth o' them tools. Krin ain't set against Bud any."

"I ain't sayin' she is; but if she has nary a suspicion, why you reckon she said for us not to bother him about lookin' for Granny? Now that's curious. She didn't say that 'bout any others of us, did she? And she said special to send for young Edson soon as daylight come. Seems willin' to have everybody bothered only Bud."

"Well, may be she knows he's goin' away, an' like to be busy."

"That's it," agreed Mr. Denny. "I've been figurin' it out on jest that lay of the land, sence I heard what Pap has to say. She knows he's goin', like enough, an' she don't want nothing to hinder. 'Cause why? 'Cause she's may be got a notion that if he don't get off quick he won't at all; an—"

"Ugh!" and Will Riker arose impatiently. "All them notions are plum nonsense. What she come down here to give the word for if she wanted him to get away first? Naw, sir; she jest hasn't any notion o' the things folks say about him o' late, that him and Granny have a 'still,' an' that the things that's been stole come to this side o' the mountain, an' all that. We've kind o' kept it from her when we could. Pap Keesy, though, he's been interferin'

in, and worryin' her some. But you're dead wrong about her suspicions o' Bud; she hain't any."

"Well, there's enough without her," concluded Mr. Denny; "and if the old woman ain't found by daylight, you bet folks'll be for arrestin' him on suspicion. Warrant or no warrant, they'll stop him from leavin' to-morrow, anyway. I heard two or three talkin' that way. And if he *ain't* guilty, he'll raise no objections."

"Well, that's so," agreed Jake's father, who had no idea that Jake was listening, with eyes of terror, from behind the chicken-coop. "But when he's told what's up, he's more like to offer to help hunt than anything else. Pshaw! What reason has he for killin' off Granny? She's more like drunk somewh- He never harmed her, I'll be bound."

"Hope you'll find yourself in the right of it; but I'd keep quiet to Dick's woman about it. I reckon they're all in bed—it don't want much o' daylight."

Mr. Riker arose and looked in the door. "That you, Krin? You settin' there all night? Now that don't do any good! There's no news yet; an' you jest go to bed with Becky Ann, an' be comfortable."

She nodded to signify she heard him; and then, in answer to a query of Denny, he walked down to the stable to see what a horse was kicking about; and an agile, skinny little form darted around the corner of the house the second their backs were turned. And Krin, hearing her name whispered just outside the window, was startled to see Jake's small excited face there. She supposed he had crawled back so long before.

"Say! you're a good friend o' Bud's, ain't yeh?" was the first question he put. "A sure-enough good friend?" he repeated, as she nodded. "Well, then, I got to tell you a thing or two," and in spite of his alarm, the responsibility

of his intent made him a trifle consequential; "an' you jest keep still as the dead—don't you yell er nothin'; you did that time you near stepped on the big snake, an' this is worse than snakes."

And with this preparation, and the sight of her still, white face, he whispered: "Folks say Bud can't leave the mountain 'less Granny's found. They'll arrest an' hang him likely if he don't get away quick. Folks say he killed Granny, an' killed Bach, too. Now what you allow to do about it?"

There was no need to tell her not to scream; she looked more as if she were paralyzed.

"Say! don't yeh hear?" demanded Jake, reaching in and grabbing her by the arm. "What you set starin' that-a-way fer? Sho! may be Granny ain't dead at all; so don't look so plum skeery. But if we let Bud know, we've got to hustle."

She understood that, at least, for without a word she arose and joined the boy around the corner of the house.

"Who said that?" she asked; and her hand on his shoulder was uncomfortably tight in its grip. "Did they say it for true?"

He nodded energetically.

"Sure enough! Pap an' Denny; they've gone to the stable. I'd a started right fer Bud if it had been daylight; but that there road is jest where I seen the ghost walk, an' I'm some against goin' alone."

A little later, when Mr. Riker came back from the stable, he glanced approvingly at the empty chair by the window, and closed the door softly.

"We'll jest let the women folks have the inside o' the house till breakfast-time," he said, motioning his visitor to a seat beside him on the porch—"no long time to wait, anyway; an' I'm glad to see Krin's took my advice an' laid

down. That poor critter has had her heart and hands full with Dick an' Granny."

. . . . .  
At the home of the bees a light shone out into the darkest bit of the whole night, the part where the dawn is yet to be, and the moon has sunk into the world behind the mountain; and the light shone within on confusion—clothes were scattered about, and a bundle tied up lay on a chair. On the table were piled the few books that had taught their owner so much of discontent; they also were ready for their journey. Whither?

Did their owner guess? Did not that "second sight" which they said he possessed—that gift of his devil—give him ever a hint of the way his feet were tending? Was that why again and again he had halted in his preparations, and left things half-finished to gaze with questioning, bewildered eyes into the night without? But not dreamily; there was too much of intensity and alertness speaking through every change of his face; and once he said aloud to the silence: "What is it—is some one here? What is it?"

But only his own voice sounded and died away in the old room, never even an echoing whisper to answer; and he turned again to his work—to the gathering together of papers, some bearing his father's name, some his own, the receipts of years, that bound together would show the absolute freedom of the dot of land on the mountain-shelf; that the gift he was leaving had never a weight to it heavier than his own love.

From sorting and marking those records, the pen glided into records of its own over the pages of a book partly filled with the chronicles of bee-colonies, an unclassed sort of epistle, part letter, part journal; and the hours went by, touching him with no idea of time. Along the valley

and around the spur of the mountain sounded the shots of the hunters and their calls. But for once the peace of the sylvan places was disturbed without him questioning why. Life on the mountain was somehow a dead thing in his thoughts.

"Thirty years," he whispered over to himself. "That's how far I could see to—no more; it's nearly that, I reckon. Is it jest me that's going away, or only memory? That would be worse, a heap worse, I know; for I saw a man once, strong and well, likely to live fifty years, folks said, but he'd live them without mind or remembrance—they had left him sudden-like, for some cause. Fifty years! Suppose I'd turn like that? What brings that notion, now? I feel like fixing these," and he touched the papers, "but when it comes to the clothes an' the books something says, 'Never mind them,' only the words don't come to my ears, but to the heart or the brain, or whatever it is that thinks in us, and it keeps me a waiting and a listening for some voice that'll speak plainer."

"Bud!"

So quietly she had come to the open window that never a whisper of the grass betrayed her; and her face was to the man like a star that shines in the darkness, but heralds the dawn. The voice for one instant seemed the thing he had waited for.

But the habitual restraint fell again over him as he moved to the door and opened it—their last meeting, where she had flown as the queen-bee flies to the forest for her clandestine love—that memory was too recent. He showed no pleasure at her coming, only said, as she entered and stood looking at him:

"Well, what has brought you?"

"Oh, Bud, I had to come—I want to tell you—"

Just then another shot sounded up from the valley, and



her face grew a shade paler at the fancied nearness of it.

"There! You hear that? Bud"—and her voice dropped low—"they're searching for Granny—for her and Bach. No one reckons they'll be found alive; and—oh, Bud, why can't you speak! Say something—I—"

He pushed a chair toward her, for an instant touching her shoulder as he helped her to it, and then walked to the fire-place.

"I got nothing more to say," he answered, briefly. "If you want my help, all you've got to do is to speak and you'll get it, but I hain't any more words. You come for me to look her up?"

"No, I didn't." Despite her faintness, she arose again and went toward him. "Bud, I want to tell you to go away, quick. They'll come straight here from the hunt, may be, and then they won't let you go if she ain't found. Oh, I'm tellin' you true. Go quick, afore the day breaks."

"You'd better set down there," he suggested. "You're noways fit to come climbing up here; and what's it all for? What call they got to stop me?"

As connectedly as she could, she repeated to him the evidence she had heard; and the listener was by far the calmer of the two, putting in never a word of protest against the suspicion.

"And oh, Bud!" she burst out, "if she *is* found dead, may be you'll never be let walk free again. May be they'll hang you for it, no matter what you say; may be—"

But the picture of horrors evoked was more than she could look at, and she broke down, shuddering, moaning.

Then, indeed, the face of the man grew less indifferent—the longing to raise her head from the back of the chair, to comfort her with caresses, shone in his eyes, and he said:

"And you, Corinny, with all them ideas, you come up here jest to help me? You—"

"Yes, sir, I did;" and she made a great effort to regain some degree of calmness, and succeeding a little, her speech was less broken. "I couldn't see any other thing to do. I mind a heap o' kindness you did, helpin' with Edie an' all, an' helpin' me, too, away back, them days I was so miserable, afore I run away; and it all come in my mind, an' I had to come. I'm sorry, sir, to see you leave the mountain, I am; but for all that, I'm beggin' you to go quick."

A certain little air of formality was with her words, and it separated her far from the Krin he had known.

"And suppose I don't go?"

Her eyes widened in a dazed sort of way. She half arose, but dropped back into the chair with a smothered cry, and one hand pressing, clenched, against her heart.

"It's—not—much," she said, gaspingly, when her breath came back. "A stitch in my side—it comes sometimes—queer—that way. I hurried some—up the mountain."

He drew away again when some of the deadly whiteness left her face.

"Is there anything in medicine I can get you?"

She shook her head. "I allow not. Mother had it afore me. Some allowed she got it so bad she died; but I don't know if that was it. Anyhow, it don't last long."

The pain had driven away her errand for a moment; but a far-off halloo, a call and answer, brought it back.

"An' please do go," Bud, she continued. "Don't tell anyone where, 'less you think you'll need help, an then I know one you could trust—Mr. Edson."

"Can you trust him?" he asked.

"Indeed yes, I can—I *do*. He's a good man, Bud. Anybody's trouble is jest like his own, if he can help any. Trust him?"—and a curious look came into her face, as if

struggling for restraint—"if I couldn't trust him now I'd go crazy."

She was thinking so entirely of her needs that she did not realize how significant her speech was, or how fully it verified his great-grown fears and completed the bar between them; but he crossed it for one instant by catching her by the shoulder and turning her face brutally to the light of the candle.

"Is it on account of anything you're ashamed of that you need to trust him just now more than any other man?" he demanded; and he looked down on her like some devil of vengeance. The slurs he had half-strangled Pap for were brought back with her words—they dared not be belief; but—"Tell me!" he repeated. "And if them folks want so bad to hang me for something, I'll give them a reason when I find him. Tell me!"

The bewilderment in her eyes was pitiful enough at the question, without the added harshness of tone.

"Oh, I—I don't know," she said, trying to free herself, and not succeeding. "You hain't any call to act so, Bud—not about him. He's never need to be ashamed, if that's what you mean—no, sir. He's jest good, an' he helps me about things; but they ain't things to be ashamed of—no, sir. An' oh, Bud, let me go—an' you go, too—quick! An' good-bye!"

"You ain't telling a lie, I reckon," he said, paying no heed to her plea, and looking into her face with puzzled scrutiny. "You never did tell a lie, as I know. You're telling true; but," and he shook his head slowly, "you ain't telling *all* the truth. Though, as you say, I hain't any call to interfere with the rest of it; that's atween yourself and—and your God, I reckon, and I'm shut away."

Whatever her answer might have been, it was checked by a small voice outside.

"Hey, Krin! our folks'll all be up if we don't get home soon, an' I reckon the men's a comin'. I hear a dog closer."

"It's Jake—he stayed out to watch," she said, rising to her feet. "Bud, if I knew any other thing to say that 'ud make you go quick an' take care o' yourself, I'd say it; but words don't seem to come easy. When I try to talk I feel too much as if I was choked. When I heard tell o' what they was going to do with you, it jest made me sick; but if they *did* it—if you let them do it, an' won't take heed o' me, I'd never get over it—the thought of it!"

"I'll take care o' myself," he said; "don't you worry. I'll go away, but I'll find Granny for you first."

"Alive?"

He shook his head.

"I can't promise that, but I'll go now to look. Yes, I allow she's alive. You go or you'll be missed. I'm obliged, but you hadn't any real call to come up here."

Poor Krin!—whose remorseful, terror-struck heart had scarcely furnished her strength for the journey up there. It had seemed life and death to her; it seemed nothing to him; and the utter futility of it all brought tears to her eyes.

"If you go away, may be I won't see you any more," she said, and held out her hand wistfully.

"I don't allow you will," he answered, slowly, and took her hand, looking long and seriously into her eyes. "Something tells me—no more in this world, Corinny. But be a good woman; make a good woman of Edie; and I hope some day you'll let her live here—after I'm gone. Go home now. Good-bye."

He laid his hand on her head, and it drooped before him in silence. She drew her fingers away, and echoed, slowly, "Good-bye." And then he stood alone in the room. She had slipped into the shadows without.

"You'd better light out," advised her guard, running to the window, with a shrill whisper. "I can hear folks talkin' somewheres. An' if you hide out, an' want grub, you jest whistle like a bob-white by our crab-apple trees, an' I'm yer man!"

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE PAGAN'S CREED.

"The people on your part of the earth are above waiting on the law of the land, are they not?" asked Dinah, as from the summit they could hear desultory shots, muffled by the distance. "The hunting-season is not in yet, but I hear them at work over there."

"Curious;" and Don halted his horse to listen. "I never heard a shot yesterday, and surely it is too hot to follow any sort of game to-day."

"It is—fearful!" and her riding-cap was turned into a fan to emphasize her words. "Lucky the road goes all the way through the timber. Where will you stop first?"

"At Lennard's. I think you would rather like to see that place—the bee-colony—though you do think the owner queer."

"I do," she acknowledged; "he isn't a bit like a man. He never looked at me but once in his life—that was the first time I saw him; and ever since he just seems to divine who I am, and says 'How are you?' but never one glance can I get from him. I don't like people to act like that!"

"Naturally," he laughed; "but what consolation there must be for you in the knowledge that few other men are strong enough to do the same."

"Don," she said, turning to him suddenly, "I have

heard you laugh aloud, as light-hearted as any boy, three times since we left the house. Where has that rather murky seriousness gone that was growing a part of you?"

"Lost in the sylvan silences, I suppose—merged into an Arcadian content. I have no longer any ambitions more worldly than the selection of a site for a log cabin and the planting of an orchard for fruit of the future. With the lessening of wants comes lightness of care. Therefore I laugh, Mistress Di—I sing. I am the age of ten years ago."

"So I perceive," she said, eying him dubiously; "but ten years ago you would not have been so easily satisfied. You had dreams of this then, had you not?"—and she touched with her whip some laurel-leaves—"fame, perhaps, through your music, and the praise of a public instead of the lowing of cattle. How are the mighty fallen!"

"Have they? I don't know. Something more wholesome is in this primitive life for me. It has made my ambitions that had only fame for a goal seem an empty affair. Yesterday I spoke to a mountaineer of the crowns of laurel people had fought for since the world began, and she put the cap-sheaf on my late harvest of convictions; though she only said: 'Why should they ever do that? I'm sure it's the most brittle wood that ever grows.' So it is, Dinah, for me. I'll turn Pan, and make music to govern my flocks by—when I get them."

"Um!"—and the young lady looked at him critically—"from my own observation of human nature in its most interesting stage, I should say you had a bad stroke. Was the blow from the oracle of the laurel episode? And, by the way, Don, the Arcadian youths were only great simpletons, after all."

He laughed with her, feeling he could afford to; the richness of hope was in the very air of the morning. What if speculation and theory would run a bit wild? He

was not the first man to grow incoherent over such prophecies as his own heart and that pagan prophet had brought him.

And the pagan prophet?

He was still in the room where Krin had left him, but not alone; and the wary, half-embarrassed eyes of his companions lessened somewhat their dignity as guards for the peace, if not of the law.

For little Jake had been right. The men's voices had come closer—in their zeal and suspicion not waiting for the dawn.

"It's some against the grain, Mr. Lennard," acknowledged the spokesman, Coon Hyle. "And more—it's again the law; but we heerd tell you was to leave the mountain mighty sudden, and we've just took it in our own hands to see that no one leaves the mountain till this is cleared up. We don't want to make trouble, but we allow you can explain some, if you're so minded; and if you won't, why, some of us'll trouble you to let us stay here till word can get to the settlements for authorities. Now that's how it is, and no ill-feeling from me. But will you tell us where you left the houn' dog of Granny Le Fevre's?"

Bud would not. He thought a little while before answering; but that was the answer when it came.

"Then we're obliged to see that you don't leave till we find out."

"I don't intend to," he answered, in so quiet and unconcerned a manner that his visitors felt a decided relief. Their anticipations had been of something very different.

"Most turrible happenin' I recollect on the mountain," sighed Pap Keesy, pulling an unhemmed square of gingham out of his pocket, as if in fear of his emotion needing that check. "One o' the oldest o' the lan'marks, yeh might

say. All a goin'—all a passin' away. It's lonely for them as is left."

"May be Bud'll send you the same trip, if you're anxious," suggested one of the unfeeling.

"An' I was jest jokin' about her, not so many days back," continued Pap, too buried in his own memories to heed the scoffer; "jokin', right yere in this yere room, 'bout her gay doin's when Le Fevre was alive—yes, indeedy! An' now she's gone, likely. There'll be mournin' 'stead of jokin' for her now. Um!"

To tell the truth, the group there was not much affected at the idea of Granny's change of abode spiritual. The suspected was the only one who seemed interested.

"Who's that you say you was 'joking' about?" he demanded.

"Lordy!—as if *you* didn't know, when yeh nigh choked the breath out o' me for speakin' of it," retorted Pap. "Why, it was poor ole Mollie, as yeh well know;" and then, with a nod and a wink, he added, "Lettin' on he don't mind! If poor Mollie is foun' dead, he'll be pleadin' the insane dodge—I'm a tellin' yeh!"

The prisoner arose and walked back and forth, smiling over the revelation in Mr. Keesy's speech. Then it was not Krin he had meant, after all.

"Why would I do that, even suppose I was guilty?" he asked—"to save my life just now an' get it left a little longer? I can't noways see that a few years more o' life is worth acting that sort o' lies for—or any sort. No, sir; no more than I can see why you'd all try to be first toward making a man suffer death, or any other torture, for some sin he'd done. If that story of Cain was true, the justice made no mistake that put the mark on him an' sent him to live his life out with it. And even if it ain't true, Moses had a good idea of what sort o' pain would hurt a



man most. But you folks"—and he glanced at the heads that had thrust themselves in at the door when he began to speak—"you all act as if you're afraid your God is likely to forget his business, and you reckon you'll have to help out with the justice part of it; you!—and there ain't any-one o' you equal to measure justice for your own families."

Each one of the men glanced at the other, scarce knowing whether to retort or laugh at the unexpected lecture.

"Well, Bud," said Mr. Hyle, at last, with an attempt to be amiable, "we'll give you good for evil, anyway. We'll see that prayers are said for you—asking mercy for a man that don't believe in Moses and the Scripture."

"They won't be answered," he decided. "No, sir; whether I'm good or bad, I ain't asking mercy. It's jest the cowards o' the earth who had to have a merciful God made for them. All the prayers the world ever heard tell of never changed a mite the consequences of any sin. They've all got to be paid for—not by prayers, either; not by repentance alone, but by atonement. Jest making amends for wrongs, so far as can be. Standin' up like a man to the retribution that is sure to follow, and then jest gettin' the bad under your feet an' living it down. Folks have to fight for strength to do all that; but any man can win the fight in time, if he wants to—if *he wants to*. But he'll never get it by stayin' on his knees an' beggin'; and he'll never get it by sayin', 'I believe,' an' tryin' to slip into salvation at the 'leven' hour on the pass-word o' Christ."

Just outside, at the steps of the back porch, two newcomers halted as that last emphatic sentence came to their ears—halted as if listening for the continuation; and after a groan from Pap, and a whistle from one of the others, Mr. Hyle broke in:

"Sho! Now, Bud; why, you're gettin' worse than ever. I allowed you did believe some in *Him*."

"Believe? believe?" returned the other, with impatient emphasis—"believe He lived, believe He died, believe He was the great teacher an' the perfected man? Yes, I do. And the Son of God—of good? Yes; for he had climbed up above sin. But I ain't dragging Christ down when I say that what He was any man or woman can be. No, sir. I'd think every living soul 'ud be so glad to reach that belief that they'd never let go of it again. Divine, you all say, as if that there jest forever barred human folks from getting near what He was—what He is. Um!"

He walked back and forth as if scarce seeing the curious faces at the door—as if searching for words to express the theories struggling in his brain. Some of them were used to Bud's "fits," though it surely was the queerest of times for a man to stray off into discussion. Not under arrest, it is true, but yet detained through a suspicion that would be depressing to most men, instead of firing one with enthusiasm regarding any divinity. But it was just another of the things which they did not think so queer in Bud as they would have thought it in another man.

"Divine—human—human and divine," he repeated. "He was that, so are we all, only most of us crowd out the divine in us till after a long time we forget it was ever in us. We say we're human; that's all. Then some others crowd out the human, too, till they get to be like animals; and lots o' animals would be disgraced by them. That's what comes o' folks drivin' out the bit o' God that's in them, not daring to believe it *is* in them for fear if they ever commenced a studying of it they'd see clear how far they'd sunk, and how far they've got to climb back again to get on a level with Christ—through lives, an' lives, an' lives, may be. You don't take stock in that, do you?" as one voice whispered

to the other at the door. "May be you could if thinkin' was done with your hands or feet, but you're all powerful careful not to use your brains."

"You hain't so mighty much book-learning yourself," retorted Mr. Hyle, in pardonable indignation; "so what call you got to preach against justification by faith?"

"That's so," agreed another, emboldened by this precedent; "you hain't no sort o' right to talk against the gospel when you never had gospel training—no more right than you have for throwing slurs at old folks 'cause they live so long."

"Slurs?"

"Yes, that's what! Yes, gentlemen, if you jest reason it out, that's what it comes to." And the speaker tilted his chair against the wall, stowed an allowance of tobacco in his cheek, and prepared for contest. "Time Riker's Addyliny died, an' Mrs. Riker took on so, didn't he say the time would come when there wouldn't be that sort o' grievin' for death—specially for children?"

Bud nodded.

"An' didn't you say that the earlier people died out o' this life the more sure people could be that they hadn't been so very wicked in the life before they come here at all, reckonin' that this world's a sort o' prison for spirits to work out their redemption in for crimes and badness done in some other world, and that the children that die are them that has to work out only a light sentence?"

Again an affirmative motion, and the speaker of the occasion glanced at the silent ones, and with the air of a man who is going to demolish the opposition, he continued:

"Well, now, allowin' that's all true—jest for the occasion, Mr. Lennard, allowin' it's true—I reckon there's a side of it you ain't looked on, and that would be so uncomfortable

most folks wouldn't want to look on; for if the longer people lived the wickeder they'd be proved, how'd that reflect on the Bible men who lived hundreds of years, to say nothing of our mountain folks, who mostly live longer than the settlement folks? And we've always crowed about that some—about the health the Lord gives us up here, and how hearty the old folks are—and all. Now, if this heathen notion of yours would be took up, where do you suppose it would land us mountain folks? Why, jest naturally at the little end of the horn; and the settlement folks would be tootin' the horn!"

"That's true enough, too," agreed Ike Dumphey, as the other ceased, triumphant. "An' there's my pap and my gran'pap—both with the angels, thank the Lord!—both good church members, as we've cause to be proud of. Now, s'pose this prison idee's *proved*, where'd we be? Why, we'd jest be shy o' makin' mention o' their names, 'case they both lived to over eighty, an' would be counted hard cases in that other life he talks about. Jest look at it that way, an' you'll see 'tain't any comfort to have things brought home to folks in that fashion."

"No, sir," chimed in a former speaker, darting an ill-pleased glance at the prisoner, who seemed to give little heed to their logic. "No, sir—nor to have the character of their church folks took away, neither; for the steadiest church pillars we have are the oldest people. An' jest s'pose the settlements would get a hold o' that notion! Jest s'pose it!"

"An' how you know prayers won't be answered?" queried Mr. Hyle. "I reckon the Lord can wipe out sins if He's a mind to. An' ain't there the sayin' that nothin' is impossible to Him?"

"I reckon," and Bud stopped in his walk to and fro and looked at the speaker thoughtfully; "but it's like lots o'

things folks say, Coon, it ain't true. There ain't any power can lift sins off a soul and leave that soul as it was before the sin had been there. A thing done is done forever. God can't wipe it out and say it never was. All that's to do is to make amends; but it's *us* has got to do it, not God. And as for prayers, why, we are all like children. The thing we'd beg and pray for once is likely the thing we'd pray to get rid of some other time. Don't you reckon the Power that rules knows that? Don't you reckon folks 'ud make a hell out o' heaven for any God that tried to answer half their prayers, even supposing He had the power to? But it never seems to me He has. Seems me to like as if God an' the world an' the souls are all bound by laws—some great law of justice that moves and binds everything. You're right, I ain't book-larned; but there's some sort o' teachin' comes through the feelin's, and that's all I've got. You folks reckon it's wrong, 'cause it don't make enough of a God that lives somewhere in the clouds and looks like Moses. But if I give up my notion o' the Almighty's plan; if I thought we had never lived but this one time, and would live no more after this, and that our souls as babies were new and clean, I'd curse such a God an' go to meet death mighty quick, hating forever a power that sets an immortal soul for its one chance o' life in a crazy man, or a cripple, or a body sick with disease, an' right alongside another soul that's in a body beautiful an' given everything its life needs for happiness—one cursed and the other blessed before they was born—jest like Esau and Jacob. Where's an almighty justice in that, unless them curses and blessin's was *earned*? No! no! no! God is good. That Spirit, that Power we are part of, the soul of it is just—higher than the justice that would give us but one time to live, and start *us* in it under a curse. No!"—and he looked out through

the window to the great arch of blue that showed through the leaves—"no; we get what we earn. We ain't cringin' or beggin' off. Some day, in some life, we'll look you in the face—you Power! Some day you'll have to give the key to all this riddle of life—you Spirit that the prayers call Father, but that I believe is mother. A mother soul, like the mother earth, it sends us out for trial. It will take us back to its besom when our race is run. We are children, blind, feeling for you in the dark, hearing your whispers in every sound of life; and, sure, however much we stumble and fall, however long it may take us to reach the good of you, there never will be a gate shut against us that in some life to come we can't earn the key to; and the fruit o' this life gives us the seed for the next. All the lessons of a life can be seen in the woods on the mountain. It speaks to you here *alive*—not the dead thoughts of dead men, who shut themselves up in walls to write. It is all here—here!" and he picked up an acorn from the window where a twig of oak had been thrown. "The fruit and the seed, and the seed in the fruit. It goes on like that always. It proves the justice o' that high Power. It smothers out the God-devil that drops curses. It whispers o' things sweeter an' stronger than all the words found in the Bible; the sweet things o' the visions them men saw but never could tell of. New ways o' speech must come first—the ways o' speech that God has, an' the winds, an' the leaves, an' the birds know an' try to tell us." And he laughed outright as he looked in their disapproving, puzzled faces. "And you'd ask me to give that all up, and believe that we're all to suffer for the original sin of Adam and Eve, and rest on the faith o' prayer, an' believe in that hell o' brimstone that an all-merciful God has got ready for us—and all I can do is jest to feel sorry for you!"

The men had ceased both exchange of derisive grins and

comment. Absolute silence fell over them as he ceased speaking and stood there, earnest and sombre-eyed, looking like some spirit of darkness proclaiming some law of damnation.

And not one of his audience doubted Pap's wildest conjectures as he proceeded. When he had finished, all of them were certain sure he had killed Granny and the best 'coon-dog on the mountain.

But those two without looked at each other in amazement—Dinah's a little more pronounced, perhaps, as it was the first time she had heard any of those heathenish theories that the mountain people condemned in a sort of fear, and it was a revelation.

"Well, your pagan friend has opinions, anyway," she said; "and now that I think that I've recovered the breath he took away, suppose we go in."

"You got here right quick, Mr. Edson," said Mr. Hyle, who assumed the rôle of spokesman, entitled thereto by having a better-improved piece of land than any of the others, besides owning a third of a thrashing-machine. "He asked to have you sent after first thing. But the—the lady—"

"Who sent? And what is the matter?" And scarcely waiting a reply, Don walked past them into the other room, where the Pagan still stood by the fire-place. "You tell me, Lennard."

"Ain't much to tell," he answered, with none of the interest in his voice that had thrilled them but a few moments before. "They're setting a watch over me, though, to keep me from leaving the mountain. They allow I've killed Granny Le Fevre; they're waiting till they find her, to be sure."

"Ridiculous!"

And then Dinah, having no reason at all to believe in the

man, only the memory of those queer ideas still ringing in her head, came promptly forward.

"I don't believe one word of it," she said, and held out her hand to give emphasis to the avowal.

"Thank you, Miss; neither do I," he answered, barely touching her hand. She thought it was through a sort of diffidence or backwardness, but it was not—only the dusk of the morning was not far gone, and the touch of another woman's hand seemed yet to thrill his own. Then he turned to Edson.

"I sent for you," he said, simply. "I reckon they'll let me talk to you alone?"

Pap was the only one who mumbled objections; but when Miss Floyd coolly walked out of the room herself and shut the door, the rest good-naturedly accepted her decision.

"You can watch the windows and the top of the chimney," she said, to console Mr. Keesy, "and there is no other way for him to escape."

"Not for most folks, may be," warned that worthy; "but he's different. He's got queer ways o' his own for comin' an' goin'. I know; I most raised him, ye know, an' allus reckoned he'd come to bad."

"Because of his raising?" queried Miss Dinah. "And was it from you he got those ideas of religion we heard as we came up?"

"Not by a long shot," was the hasty disclaimer. "Nor from nary another man on the mountain, either. Mountain folks is believers mostly; these gentlemen'll tell ye. But him—he's jest naturally plum cussed."

Within the room the two men spoke low. Only a murmur of the voices reached the others. A package of papers tied compactly together was accepted by Don without a word. He had heard no explanation, and asked for none,



though he could but wonder at the man's utter unconcern as to his own position.

"If anything happens me, jest open those papers an' you'll see who and what they're for. Maybe you won't have to take care of them long," he added, with a faint smile. "An' I'm going to trust you with another thing—that is, if you're willing."

"Try me."

"She allowed this morning *she* trusted you a heap," he said, steadily; "an' if she can I can, I reckon."

"Krin—this morning?"

"Yes, sir. She come to warn me, but I'd no notion o' leaving till this was cleared; but they," and he nodded toward the kitchen, "seem to think every man's a liar, and I don't mind much this morning, for it keeps jest that many off the hunt."

"Oh! Yes, I suppose it does," was the inane reply to the damaging statement.

"That's what I thought; that's why I'm easy enough to keep here. I wouldn't stir, even if they all left the house. Reason why? They'd watch. But they ain't like to watch you, and so I want you to go some place where I darsen't go myself."

"Well"—and Mr. Edson's eyes wandered up and down the powerful-built figure of the man—"that's a nice proposition for Goliath to make to David; but let me know the direction of your altar of sacrifice."

"It ain't far. There ain't so much to do; it's jest to keep out o' the way o' the folks that 'ud watch me, and to give a warn to some other folks that needs it. I'll tell you this much, though," he added; "I don't know myself what they're in hidin' for, and I don't want to know. Sometimes the less you know about a man the more you're willing to do for him, and I reckon this is one o' that sort. You're agreed?"

"Only waiting orders," answered Mr. Edson, promptly. "I am not understanding much of this, but it will be time enough to back out if I learn that it means harm to anyone. Up to that point, I'm content to work in the dark."

The other smiled at him.

"If the woman they're a searching for ain't back in her cabin in three hours' time, I give you leave to tell anyone all I ask of you." And getting a paper and pencil, he wrote slowly, in a large, crude hand, a few lines. "You can read it if you're so minded," he said. And this is what there was to read:

*Get Granny home; a man's took up for the murder of her. You have three hours to do it in, but I won't keep your secret longer than that.*

A FRIEND.

"No harm in that, is there?" asked the writer. "Well, there's a black birch grows up out of a crack in the ledge closet to a split poplar, jest below where we met yesterday. I want that pinned about a yard from the ground on that birch. No one above'll see it, but anyone in the gully'd have to. Then whistle three times, not loud, but you know how, jest to give notice to anyone in hearing; and then you can clear out o' that soon as you've a mind to. May be it 'ud be better not to run risk o' seeing anyone; leastways, we'll give them three hours' notice."

"And if Granny is not so dead as these folks think, what is your idea of her absence?"

"I haven't any," he said, in a tired way. "I've had other things to think of. You see, I'm going away from the mountain."

A something plaintive in the man's words made Don turn to him impulsively.

"Why are you?"

The other looked at him kindly, but shook his head.

"You asked me that yesterday, too," he answered. "If I'd told you then, I would a said it was for fear I might kill someone if I stayed; but that ain't the reason to-day," he added, as Edson stared at him. "That's all gone this morning; something drove them thoughts away. I'm a going soon, but I want folks to be happy that I leave behind—you too. I never felt toward any man as I do to you"—and his contemplative gaze made Mr. Edson feel uncomfortable. "May be it was that bird in your throat that witches folks, but I hain't always trusted you, and I have always liked you. I thought I would jest say that to you this morning; something might happen. I mightn't see you again; and I trust you to-day."

"But what of to-morrow?"

"We haven't got to to-morrow yet, an' I'm getting where I can't count ahead; but I believe in you, and so does—she."

"Krin? Have you spoken—"

"She said so," he replied. "Now go. Good-bye."

"Why, I will see you again," decided Don, his heart warming unusually toward the man who prophesied his own happiness—"many times, I hope."

But he went as he was told, for the time was slipping by; and though he had almost forgotten it while talking to the accused, yet a man's life might actually depend on his own errand.

In the other room there was a general show of interest when he made his appearance.

"Own up to anything?" queried Mr. Hyle; but hearing a negative, looked anxiously at the papers he had seen on the Pagan's table. "He got me an' Cleve there to witness him signin' some paper he was writin' when we come," he said; "now I allow it's with them—"

"Likely," returned Don. "Come, Miss Floyd, I have to

get around past Riker's, and the sun is getting warmer every minute."

"Don't know as papers ought to be let leave the house jest now," debated Pap, suspiciously. "This ain't an every-day case, especial as they're close cronies an' sich. I hain't anything to say, but if I had—"

"If you have, Ananias, tell it to the sheriff and send him after me when he comes," suggested Mr. Edson. "And you might send him to look up that murdered hog of Lenard's at the same time."

"Bud hain't complained o' losin' any."

"Bud don't complain of anything, even of you," was the retort that showed a sad lack of reverence on Mr. Edson's part. "Well, Dinah?"

Dinah had approached the middle door to make her adieux to the suspected; but he was by the table, his head bowed on his arms, the whole attitude a bar against any careless entrance, and with a swift, pitying glance, she turned away.

"Well, it is lucky for my susceptible nature that your pagan preacher is leaving this territory, or that we are soon; all at once I am wondering how I came to think him stupid."

Don did not reply, he had so much food for both trust and distrust in his own mind. But the letter once off his mind—well, it was only three hours to wait. at the worst.

"And it is eleven now," he said, aloud.

"Yes; what of it?"

"Would you mind going home alone when you get ready?" he asked. "That affair back there will give me some work, and—"

"Enough said," she decided. "I am growing used to being toled over here and abandoned. Last time it was for a goddess, this time for a pagan who seems rather pious. Yes, go your way. I rather like the brave feeling of looking after myself."

"And will you take care of these?" She took the papers. "One is his will," he said; and the girl, with a remembrance of her last view of the writer, rode on in silence. "I am going to look up some trees on the mountain," he said, as they neared the house in the valley; "so if anyone should ask you, you know."

She looked as if she did not believe him, but he only laughed at her, and altogether seemed rather happy, considering the gloomy probabilities among his tenants. And one tenant—

Her face was the first he saw as he neared the house; and how it lit up at the sight of him! Even Jake, whose allegiance was divided between their landlord and Bud, did not look more eager, did not hasten to greet them with more eager questions.

Dinah could not take her eyes from Krin, she was so changed from the white, waxen creature of such a short time ago—her eyes were so bright, so burning, a flush was in her cheeks, and her lips, with their tender curves, had something tremulous yet decided that was adorable. The wistfulness had vanished.

"Ah!" thought Miss Floyd, "the anemone will yet turn rose. Is my cavalier the magician?"

It seemed so, for her eyes watched him so eagerly; and how she listened to every word as he spoke highly of Bud to Riker, who had refused to be of the party who went up as guard!

But while his words were to others, he too was looking in awakened wonder at Krin. Could it possibly be the pale, frightened creature who had told him her occult fears, and who but yesterday had raised her wet eyes to his instead of those strangely brilliant ones? What was it? Had that blessed pagan, in the goodness of his heart, spoken to Krin as well as to himself of the thing that had filled his heart all

night? Someway he convinced himself it must be that; it is hard to keep from thinking the thing we want to think.

"My-oh-my! Ain't these awful times on the mountain?" said Becky Ann, hurrying out at sight of the visitors. "Jest light off an' come right in; that sun's burnin'. No news, I reckon? We've been upset all night with the searchers—got scarce a mite o' sleep; and Krin there, she jest set up the live-long night, an' this morning"—her voice was lowered that it might not go beyond Miss Dinah's ear—"this morning she's right down nervous from it, an' her eyes look queer as fever."

"Then fever is wonderfully becoming to some people," answered the visitor, watching Don, who had dismounted for a moment and was saying what reassuring words he could of Granny's absence, but saying nothing of the paper he carried that gave him a hope.

Krin listened, saying little; she had no hope herself. All night she had sat there thinking it over. No, Granny could never get lost. The premonition of some evil to come on the mountain was proving true; it had begun.

"I know now what his—Dick's voice must a meant; it was a sign o' death. That's what it is when the dead comes back, sure."

Dick's child looked up in her face and laughed and blinked a little at the glaring sun.

"You see she knows enough to laugh at your notions," said Don. "And so will you before night, when the old lady takes a notion to come back."

"But if she don't? If she's dead—if she can't?"

Her vehemence was so unlike her. He thought what a loving, tender nature it was that could feel so deeply for the old woman whose treatment of her had not been of the best.

"Try not to worry to-day," he said, gently. "Whatever happens, you are among friends, Krin."

He dared attempt to say no more, for Mr. Riker was approaching with a bucket of water for his horse; but she must have understood from the grateful glance she sent up to him.

"I know," she said; "but there's someone else'll need help worse than me if she ain't found."

"You mean Bud?"

She nodded.

"Oh, well, we'll get him bailed until investigations are through, supposing he is really arrested; he didn't seem to mind it much this morning."

"No, that's jest Bud," complained Mr. Riker. "An' if the worst comes to the worst, he's like to act the same way—may be not take bail, may be walk to the scaffold without even tryin' to hire a lawyer to clear him. Fact is, you don't never know what to look for him to do."

*"Walk to the scaffold?"*

"There, there, Krin, go on in the house," said her host; "an' don't look so skeery. I hadn't any sort o' business to say that, for Bud ain't goin' to any scaffold. No sir; Bud'll be all right. I blurted that out, never thinkin' how women folks get scared o' sech. You better stay in out o' this heat, anyway, when you have nary a cover on your head."

So talking and soothing down the effects of his rough words, or trying to, he went with her to the door-step. But she did not go in, she sat down where he left her; and as the horse ceased drinking, and Don remounted, he nodded a friendly adieu, but she did not seem to notice.

Riker went back to the stable. Inside, Becky Ann was telling her visitor how "riled" Will was at the notion of holding Bud on the mountain till Granny was found.

"Will, he always thought some o' Bud, though, more than most folks. He'd stick to Bud through a good deal; but then if there *is* plain evidence brought up, Will's too poor a man

to be much help. It's money that talks in the court house! Though the best o' Bud's bargain 'ud be to clear out afore the lawyers get hold of him; for they're always bound an' set to convict someone if a crime's done; an' folks that have the mountain for the court house, either never come back or else come changed to the worse. I've seen them more than one time."

And he might have been saved from that dread chance if he had but listened to her and gone quickly in the morning—and now—

Their words were carrying an undreamed-of weight to her. Dinah glanced at her once or twice, thinking how still she sat, and wondering if she was really so affected by the loss of that horrid old woman; and with the memory of her eager meeting with Don, fell to wondering still more if that gentleman's weakness for flirtation was going to be met half-way with the serious belief of this desolate-looking child.

It was perhaps due to the fact that those summer guests of the mountain had seen nothing of the domestic life of Dick and Krin, but they always failed to realize that Krin was either wife or widow. A desolate child was Miss Dinah's idea of her, as she sat there apparently taking little heed to their words.

Where her thoughts were was not hard to guess, however, when she surprised them by saying:

"He can't have got far yet. I hain't been sittin' here long, have I?"

"My-oh-my! Krin, are you so plum 'wildered with all this that you're losin' 'count o' time? Mr. Edson you're thinkin' of? No, he ain't no distance yet; barely out o' sight, I reckon."

She arose and held out the child to Becky Ann.

"I can't run with her," she said; "an' I want to tell him something—I forgot."



And awaiting neither query nor protest, she vanished through the door, and for an instant her going reminded Dinah of that other day when she had seen her first. Just a fitting form that seemed winged, and that darted from the open space into the green mysteries of the wood.

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## CHAPTER XXL

### KRIN'S CHOICE.

Silence quivered upward with the sun, and even the rocks of Indian Ledge seemed alive with heat as he touched them at times, climbing over the nearest route to that black birch by the split poplar.

Once in the circle of the thousands of trees, he more than once realized that it might be a task to find a particular one or two of them. His horse was left at the forge. He had no fear of being watched, yet there were, no doubt, more people than usual on the mountain, and it would be easier to avoid them on foot. Some distant halloos came to him at times, some far-off barks of dogs. The immediate vicinity had evidently been searched thoroughly; those in the quest were circling to a wider range. Several times he crossed trails of the men, and though they were not to be seen, yet the wood did not seem nearly so vast as the morning before; all humanity seemed to have drawn a little closer since that time. He smiled to himself as he thought of the reason, and set it aside as much as he could, knowing that somewhere near him was a mystery that might need what wit he could gather—none of it could be spared to rest down in the valley.

After all, the birch was not so hard to find; the poplar

struck by lightning shone a white landmark among the greens of many shades. Looking about, he remembered that it must have been near those trees the hound had disappeared—the main cause of suspicion against Lennard.

“Well, if their idiocy continues, I can tell, at least, that the dog was not killed by him—not the time he was seen following it, at any rate. I don’t understand him, but I’ve a sort of liking for him; and he didn’t trust me, but had a sort of liking for me. That was a queer thing for him to say; but it is not any queerer than the communication I’m to pin to the tree—a latter-day Orlando. I’d give double postage to know who is intended to read it.”

Not a rustle but his own step sounded near as he slid down to the foot of the stone wall, and felt the wind-spread carpet of elastic leaves under his feet. Not a breath of air fluttered the paper as he fastened it to the dark bole, where it would surely show plainly to anyone who crept into the rift of the rock to look. But who would?

He might not have asked that question with so light a personal interest could he have seen one face that, secure in the shadows of a narrow-necked crevice, watched his movements with startled eyes—eyes with the look in them of an animal that hears the step of the hunter.

It might have even disturbed some of his dreams that he felt at liberty to indulge in after the letter was posted and the whistle sounded. That affair was off his hands for three hours. In the meantime, he would see Daphne.

No, he had got not a glimpse of the eyes that watched him, else less of hope might have colored those dreams—dreams that he ridiculed, yet held so close, and was hurrying forward into the future to meet.

He passed the cabin on the Ledge, looking bare and forsaken with but one night’s vacancy; but there are some houses, both cabins and mansions, that have never the soul

or the atmosphere of any living meaning in them, and this witch-cabin was one of them. He thought of that as he walked by on the laurel-edged path. Of all its inhabitants, Krin alone had a soul that might have lent meaning to a home, and she—poor child!—she seemed always, with all her dependent fearfulness, more at home in the forest.

So he was thinking of her—of the trustful simplicity of her that a man should be proud to keep always unsullied by doubts of the world. Could a man, having wakened the trust of so pure a soul, ever risk seeing unfaith grow in her eyes instead? Ah, the fancies!

And in the midst of them she arose, as if out of the ground, before him.

"I called and called," she said, abruptly; "and then when I found your horse tied I knew you would come back, so I waited."

"To see me? Oh, Krin!"

Before the curious eyes of the others down the valley he had held his thoughts in check, only an hour before; but now that she had come to him again in the wild places, the places where Daphne belonged, and come with all that new, strange light in her eyes!—well, his hands went out to her, as he saw her in the shadow of the forge rock, and with half-chiding, wholly pleased questions, he met her.

But she drew back from his hands. She looked at him with imploring eyes, and a mingled fear, defiance, and decision in her manner. It was not Daphne as she had ever looked to him before.

"No, sir, I won't shake hands, please; may be never no more. I'll tell you why; may be you won't want to after—oh, that's no sort o' difference," she said, hurriedly. "It's other things I come to say. I heard them talking back there—about that!—the court house—may be the gallows—

an' I come! He—he mustn't be let go there. *You* can help that—folks trust you. If you'd give the word now afore the sheriff comes, they'd take it, an'—an' he could get away across the line. It 'ud jest be some money lost, that's all; but you'd get it back again. I'd work—I'd pay you—I'd—"

"*You* would pay it back?" He felt as if the heat had scorched all sense out of his brain, such idiotic thoughts were suggested by her kindly sympathy for that man. "And it is Lennard you are speaking of?"

"Yes, that's who. Poor folks can't help him. I heard them say so. May be no one can if they ever take him to the court house—an' that's why. Oh, you're good! You ain't poor. You can do it!—right now, right away. I thought you'd never come, but I found the horse here, so I waited; an' now—"

Her eyes dropped under the steady, questioning regard of his own; a colder scrutiny than she had ever seen in him silenced the plea on her lips for a moment. She had not the courage to look in his eyes and speak; but, with averted head, she went on.

"You don't say anything," she said, wistfully. "An' it's the first time I ever knew any to come to you for help an' not get it. May be it's 'cause you think that, after all, he's wicked—his thoughts are wicked, an' they are, I reckon; but—but—look here, Mr. Edson"—and the desperate tone of her pleading again swept over him like a wave that scorched and froze him—"you was kind yesterday; you offered to help me about another house somewhere, for me an' Edie. I thought jest then that I wanted that more than any other thing in all the world, but I don't. I'm scared here, but I'll stay. I'll live among the snakes, I'll live ha'nted all my life, I'll never ask help o' none, if you'll only go an' give *him* the help you'd a give me!"

"And why are you asking that?" He heard himself saying the words, though he could scarcely feel himself doing so; his lips were far too stiff for whistling away puzzling things as usual.

She looked up at his question, and an answer might have been read in her eyes, but he refused it; and under his exacting gaze she covered her face with her hands, and dropped on the rock floor of the forge, half-kneeling, and near to his feet.

"May be I can say it—now—to you," she said, whisperingly. "I don't want to lie. You're like I said—like the priests some folks tell sins to when they get too heavy; an' mine are now. An' I never know it till—till they break me down. But it's true; I'm wicked—wickedder than him—far! I must always a been, an' didn't know it. *That's* why Dick's a ha'ntin' me. Spirits know things we think, an' I was Dick's wife—his wife, an' all the time must a been thinkin' o' someone else in my heart. I must a been. If it hadn't been growin' there quiet, day an' day, it wouldn't a been so—so strong to kill me most now. An' that's what it'll do yet, I reckon. I knew it all at once this mornin' when I heard what they was to do with him. If they kill him, I couldn't live, Mr. Edson. My life 'ud go with his."

And Mr. Edson heard—heard more than her halting, humble, desperate confession betrayed. As an accompaniment to her sobbing whispers, he heard the echo of slow, serious speech that had so short a time since, in that very spot, thrilled him by a widely different idea of her sympathies. The sombre green-gray eyes seemed yet looking conviction into his own. What a lie! What a lie!

He bent forward to raise her, but she shook her head, crouching fearfully as if for judgment. She had not dared raise her eyes once—her sin and her shame were so absolute to her.

"And he?"

"He ain't bad, that way," she said, brokenly—"not bad enough to—like me. It's only 'cause I am some like a girl—she is dead—that he was good to me. He'll never know how I'm thinkin'; how bad I've got to be—wicked, wicked, wicked!—more than him. *He* never had the right Bible belief, nor the right church belief; it wouldn't come to him. But it come to me—oh, it did! I had that much o' the blessin' o' God; an' now"—she threw back her head and raised an intense, tear-wet face to his as if forcing herself to speak the horror and face the terrible condemnation due it—"an' now I'm turned in sin from its promises. They say he is curst, an' it's true, I reckon; but I'd go to the hell where he goes sooner than go to the heaven where he'll be shut out from."

Absolute silence. The mountain had not yawned and taken her to swift death for the terrible confession; the sky, yet serene, had sent no stroke of lightning. Her listener had launched never a word of scorn and condemnation for her sin, yet she had felt she was daring them all when she made that choice.

But even silence can bear a crushing weight under its moveless wings. She felt it, and whispered:

"It isn't just me; it's something stronger than me. I can't help it."

Then he spoke, but the keen contempt she dreaded did not come, and his voice sounded strained and queer.

"No, little one, I know; you can't help it."

Afterward, he never could recall what other words he spoke; what he promised her, or how they parted. He was conscious of a desire and intention to do the things she begged for, and then he found himself alone, with a dull physical pain in the heart—a thing that sickened him

with every breath he drew, and a thing so altogether new in his knowledge of himself as to be bewildering.

"What was that he said about throwing out challenges to God?" he asked himself. "Did I, or did I not? I don't remember, but I rather think fate has given me the benefit of the intention."

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### A RESURRECTED LANDMARK.

Evidently the heat was too withering for the "authorities" to venture on a ride from the settlements in the middle of the day; anyway, the middle of the afternoon had arrived, but no sheriff. The self-suggested guards were getting tired of their responsibility. The enthusiasm of the morning in the cause of right was cooling. Some of them growled dissatisfaction at the sheriff, some at Bud, and some at Granny. Bach was the only special object of interest that escaped some sort of blame. Instead of blame, Bach was remembered by accounts of his prowess; there was a loss that was a loss! Remarks of condemnation and glances of ire were directed toward the man whom they fancied had robbed the mountain of so much sagacity.

But he was rather philosophic under it all. After Don had gone with the paper, he was silent and indifferent to the others, only, hearing one of those regretful remarks about Bach, he looked at the length of the shadows in the garden, and said:

"If any of you are so anxious over that dog, you'd better go down to the cabin and see if he ain't got back."

"No use; Dave Hentz, he come up past there jest after them Edsons left."

"That's nigh four hour ago, though," said one of the others, "an' of course there might be some later news. Do you reckon Granny 'll be there, Bud?"

"I wouldn't be noways surprised to hear it," he said, quietly; and the men glanced at each other questioningly.

"Wonder if there's anything in that?" said Dumphley, when they had adjourned to the kitchen.

"Hard tellin'; but then, Bud don't talk 'less he means something."

"Some of you take a run down and see, anyway—no harm in that; and he acts so plagued queer that a fellow don't know what to think."

"I'll go, too," volunteered Pap. "It's terrible hot, but we can take the woods for it; an' if there's any word o' poor Mollie—poor old Moll—one o' the landmarks o' the mountain, gentlemen! Yes, sir, I'll go, too."

Which he did, peering as he went along every fallen tree, or every hollow one, seeking with snivels of reminiscence the form regretted, though so late.

"Reckon that there loom o' hers 'll be sold with the other truck," he remarked, thoughtfully, as they drew near the house. "It hain't been used for years now, and ain't worth money; but I've got to do some sort o' business, now Bud's turned out so. Can't live 'round that sort o' man no longer; no, sir. You're like, now, to be one o' the committee to settle her affairs, ef there's a sale. I reckon none o' the votes now 'ud go agin me a gettin' that there loom, for old friendship sake—hey? Old friendship! Yes, indeedy. Time was when she'd a been keepin' house fer me fer the askin'. I'm 'bout the only one left on the mountain as minds her when she was young. Well, well, the Lord's will be done; an' he's took her, I reckon. I'd set store by that loom to remember her by. Yes, sir! Seems like I can see her yet. Well, I'll be d—d!"



It was the most ordinary of things that caused the ~~scale~~ of his recollections—simply a view of the open cabin door with Bach stretched across it; and within a face shone through wreaths of smoke, as the faces of cherubs gleam through curtains of cloud, and the face was Granny's, with a pipe in her mouth.

She removed it to order Bach out of the way of the visitors, and Pap fairly tottered in, and stared, speechless, at the arisen landmark

"Why, we've searched the hills over for you!" burst out Mr. Dumphrey, aggrievedly. "Where you been?"

"Oh, ye did?" grunted Granny. "You're Ike Dumphrey, an' you an' your woman been keepin' yer tongues goin' unceasin' 'bout me fer years. So I'd jest like to know what you're wantin' o' me now."

"Want you! We don't *want* you, only it seemed human-like to search."

"Yes, Mollie," quavered Pap, "we have been a searchin' high an' low. Slep' nary a wink myself sence the word went out. I—I'd jest give ye up."

"Give me up! Lord-a-mighty! ef yeh wanted me so bad why didn't yeh come to the house 'stead o' the hills?"

"Why—why, yeh wa'n't here."

"That's a lie!" said the landmark, promptly. "Allus was a failin' o' yours, Keesy—lyin' an' stealin' sheep. I mind yeh! Not here!" and she thrust out a foot wrapped up and pointed to the crutch beside her. "How you reckon I'd get away with a strained foot, hey? Got it hurt about sundown yesterday."

"You wasn't here last night," said Dumphrey.

"You're another! I reckon it's Krin you-all was wantin'. She's lit out somewheres."

"Naw, she ain't. She's down at Riker's, terribly worried. She—we 'lowed you'd been—Lordy! Lordy!" he broke in,

remembering the guard up on the mountain—"Bud, he's been held fer killin' yeh an' Bach."

"Bud, is it?" and she rocked back and forward in silent laughter. "Bud? That's worth hearin' tell. But you're fools, the lot of yeh! Do I look dead?"

"We searched here more than once last night," insisted Dumphey, stolidly. "There wasn't any sign of a livin' thing here then."

"Yes, there was"—and Granny's smile was diabolically mysterious—"there was a big spotted sow never ten feet away from the porch."

The men looked at her and at each other, and Mr. Dumphey arose and went out of the door.

"We'd better get up the mountain and let the folks know," he remarked. "Are you coming, Keesy?"

"Stay fer supper, won't yeh?" called Granny, with meaning cackles of laughter. "I'll give yeh some dishes yer woman can't cook. I was pickin' roots fer them on the mountain yesterday."

But her invitation only reminded Mr. Keesy also that it was getting late, and with rather nervous steps he sidled past her, and past Bach, who blinked knowingly at the two men from the door-way.

"Looks like the devil in her has a mate in him," was Mr. Dumphey's opinion. "He looks like as if he knowed all the things about that cussed den, and could tell them if he wanted to."

"Reckon he can," and Mr. Keesy's voice was lowered, lest it might reach the keen dog-ears. "There's three things on this here mountain that folks 'ud need a key to understand, an' that's old Moll, Bach, an' Bud. How'd Bud know we'd find her there, hey? There's some devil's conjurin' in it. Him up there on the mountain, and not a-nigh her, an' her disappear an' appear again as ef she'd

never left the spot, an' so crippled, as yeh can see, that she couldn't a got fur. Jest explain that, will yeh?"

"I ain't thinking of that near so much as I am of one other thing"—and Mr. Dumphey's eyes met Mr. Keesy's with a dark significance—"and that's the spotted sow that did lay there by the porch while we searched; and the more I think of it the more I believe that that there sow lay there lazy-like because *she was lame*."

The pause that followed proved that his listener received all the suggestive meaning underlying that statement. A chill crept through the heat of the day and lingered around Pap's scanty locks, and a shudder ran over him, as he glanced back toward the late lamented landmark.

"It's the devil's doin's," he insisted, impressively; "that an' Bud's second-sight, No follower o' the Lord can ever find the 'how' o' that."

And to this day they remain among the mysterious unproven things of the mountain.

. . . . .

And Krin?

Clasping the child, as the faithful clasp the cross in their deepest despair, she turned her feet again toward the place that she had never a doubt would be ha'nted now for her forever.

She had made her one sacrifice, had humiliated herself to the confession of her blackest sin, that no silent lie should weaken her plea in the judgment of her confessor. And, after all, it was in vain. Not refused, only the desperate need that had moved her to feeling and confession had never really existed. It had been only a fancy. It was past, and in its wake walked shame beside her—that was all. She had not even served him—that was the heart-aching thought of it. If it had been of any use, if he had been saved in any way through her pleadings, through her

humiliation, that knowledge would have been the crown she could have raised her head to bear. But it was denied. Crownless, she would walk forever with her own shame. He would never even know how far she excelled him in wickedness.

And there were two men in the world into whose eyes she would never dare look again.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### BREAKING AND BINDING.

That evening, though tired and a bit impatient with Don for disappearing so entirely, Dinah carried the sensation of the day to "the children," as she had dubbed the seniors, and rather exulted over the unusual wildness of the superstitions attached to the reappearance of Granny; the witchy supposition was quite the most delightful part of it—that and the Pagan's preaching.

"He has without knowing it convinced me that I have wasted my summer out here in looking for 'pretty' things," she declared. "I shall come out next summer, with added wisdom, and paint that green-eyed monster."

"Is he so ugly?" asked the interesting invalid, whose slight lameness had won him consideration and cushions that a better man with a sound frame might have begged for and not got—"so very ugly?"

"Ugly—well, not so ugly as odd and"—with a little laugh—"uncanny. Just imagine a huge figure with immense shoulders coming toward you, a lot of black hair, too much of it, and the head almost always bent; but when it does begin to straighten up, it seems to tower over you. And his eyes, under the ledges of brows, can give you such

an impression of seeing through you; and I object to being seen through, especially by green eyes. But his voice—I can't say that I ever heard him talk, beyond an occasional mutter, until to-day—his voice is the one redeeming, interesting thing in the uncouth-looking creature."

"But you know, dear, you can't paint that," reminded Miss Lottie.

"True for you. I could not even describe it. And the wonder to me is that Don has never talked more about him; for I really believe it is partly that man's influence that has interested Don so much in this life out here. Oh, you needn't smile, Mr. Donald—I do. The Pagan is peculiar among all the others, and Don is attracted by peculiar things."

"Hence—" And Mr. Donald's eyes twinkled at her quizzically.

"Hence—nothing of the sort," she retorted. "I am not at all peculiar. I am just one of the ruttiest of the people who always drive their wheel of life through the ruts. If I were rich, I would be one of the fashionable rich; not being so, I try to skirmish up some very thin substitute for talent, and flout a little at life outside of the enchanted circle of art. But"—and she laughed frankly in Miss Lottie's reproving face—"it is all make believe. I am only bored by my own attempts. The ladder to fame is always so slippery, icy—and then it is so lonesome. I have lived too long, and learned so many things that are much nicer. I like the crowds of living people to study, not the books on anatomy. I like men—modern men—better than all the masterpieces of antique copies. I prefer handsome ones, but have found many ugly ones who know how to make themselves charming. If possible, I like two at a time within calling distance, and one of the two generally within whispering distance. And I'm not so peculiar, either, as your looks would seem to indicate."

**"My dear!"**

**"Thank you, Auntie; you said that as if you meant it."**

The lame senior was doing his best to frown on her, but did not quite succeed.

**"Does—is your future husband acquainted with those final views of yours?"** he inquired, blandly.

**"N-no, I reckon not, as the mountaineers say; for—"** And she glanced at the pair of them. She read in their eyes the lecture they both intended reading her; she knew there was to be a lecture on another subject meted out, so why not have them both at once. To be sure, Don ought to be there too and get his share, but she had shoulders broad enough to bear it all; and with a wicked sense of delight, she added: **"For, to tell the truth, my future husband is yet to enter the—alas!—slim lists for my hand; he has not as yet materialized."**

**"Dinah, dear!"**

**"Why, Don—"**

**"Oh, Don?"** and her laugh was not in the least affected. **"You did not suppose that little farce of ours was earnest, did you? My dear Mr. Donald, I would like you immensely as an uncle, but I can't undertake to make Don miserable for life, even for that selfish gain."**

The desirable uncle seemed to expand and enlarge with indignation that threatened to be explosive; with one rush of his fingers his hair stood on end. With a preparatory *ahem!* he turned square on the rebel the lightning of his glance, and as suddenly collapsed again.

Miss Lottie had looked at him. Not with a look of ire that had defeated his, but with the prettiest pleading glance imaginable; and he retreated; he changed his line of battle.

**"Do you know, young lady, what a broken engagement now may mean to Don?"**

**"It will break his heart, Dinah."**

"It will do nothing of the sort," contradicted Dinah. "His heart is entirely too elastic, and he's had too much experience. Bless you both! he would have gone like a martyr to the altar if he thought anybody's happiness was at stake, and been bored to death with the whole business. That is just what ails the boy, he has been bored to death with too many girls like me; that is the reason why he leaps into the primitive sea of life out here with so much zest, and takes to pagans as to bosom friends. Just the want of some unusual element in life that we are too worldly to contribute."

"Well, if he wants the unusual"—and the senior's glance completed the sentence.

"Oh, but you are mistaken there!" she insisted. "I am not unusual at all, unless it has been in not falling in love with him—girls generally do; and he *can* sing."

"But, Dinah, the entire arrangement—"

"Is settled," laughed Dinah. "I told him last night I was tired of being engaged, and he—"

"What did he say?" demanded his uncle.

"Well, he kissed me to begin with," she confessed—"the kiss, you know, that he did *not* give me that day when you settled us for life; and then he congratulated me on my good sense."

The two match-makers looked at each other in dismay and blushes. Miss Lottie did the blushing—blushing for the blushless frankness of the girl who left them not a shred of sentiment to hope on.

"I don't see why you ever let the curtain go up on the farce," remarked the senior, grimly.

"I hadn't anything to do with it. You and Auntie had it all so beautifully arranged for us, neither of us had time to say our hearts were our own. But it is all right, after all. Don is wedded to the woods, and I— well, I'll marry the

next man asks me, if you want a wedding so badly. But"—and she edged toward the door—"Don and I are not the only marriageable people in the two families, and you need a guardian angel quite as badly as your nephew."

And with that last shot she vanished—fairly ran from the room, and almost into the arms of a gentleman named March who astonished her by rising from the rustic seat outside the window.

"Oh! you've come back," she remarked, lamely.

"None too soon, I suspect;" and he frowningly shook hands and held her at arm's-length. "Pretty goings on I heard of while trying to get a moment's rest there! What sort of an account have you to render up for the season?"

"The season is not over yet," she answered, demurely.

"Yours is; you have done enough mischief. Society needs a protection against such greed as yours. I am willing to shield it by offering to be one of the gentlemen within call for the rest of my life. I will also see that the other gentleman does not get within whispering distance."

"You would have to be clever," she laughed.

"I will be. The reputation of our family will depend on it."

"I declare, you can be just as disagreeable as ever."

"Quite. Will you marry me?"

"You haven't had supper yet, have you?" she asked.

"No; that has nothing to do with this question."

"Oh, yes, it has; you think you want a wife, but it is really a cook. You think it is your heart that is empty, and it is only your stomach."

"Excuse me, but I have not said a word about my heart."

"It is time you did, then," she whispered; and the rest of the interview drifted so far from their usual cynicism that even their chronicler has no business on the veranda.



But however sentimental their drift, the prosaic ending of it was supper—the daintiest of little suppers, such as Dinah's genius was given to evolving, even in the face of the cook's statement that there was not a bite to be had. But there was, several bites, and it took a ridiculously long time to finish them; so long that Miss Lottie, arousing herself to a remembrance of the world, said, blushing and embarrassed:

"Where do you suppose Dinah is? It is surely a long time since she left us."

For in the most unaccountable way time had stopped up there on the summit that night; the rest of the world had seemingly drifted into the valley—anyway, it was far off, and time, for a little while, had stood still with the seniors. It had even rolled back—almost thirty years of it.

"Just so much of living lost!" said the man, leaning over and taking her hand. "Lottie, suppose I had spoken that winter? No, you could not have trusted me then. She had just died, and you knew too much of that weakness. And then—then I wandered far afield until guardian angels gave me a wide berth; and all the time—Lottie, how did that girl guess what I need? I know I never dared grind a hope out of my loneliness."

Miss Lottie, tremulous, and fearfully happy, shook her head.

"I am sure I don't know. What in the world will we say to her and to Don? It seems so—"

"Much as it should be," he completed; "and say, Lottie, couldn't you manage to give me one smile without tears in your eyes?"

Evidently she succeeded, from the low, grateful word of endearment that ended so hastily as the door opened and the missing cause of their present relations entered.

"Am I forgiven?" she inquired, peeping in. "For I

have brought a visitor, and if I am in disgrace, I will continue to talk to him out here."

But Miss Lottie had recognized the face in the hall.

"Not when it is Mr. March," she declared; and Mr. March was welcomed forthwith. The contagion of happiness was in the air, and the quartette had gathered a comfort unto themselves that ignored even the heat that yet enveloped the heights.

"Something unheard-of at this season," stated the senior. "The oldest of the natives say it would be thought extreme even in July, and here is the hunting-season almost upon us."

"That is what brought me back," remarked Mr. March. "I saw these forests in May, and felt sure there would be something in them worth hunting in October, so I worked like a Turk all summer to be rich enough to allow myself the indulgence."

"Ah! you belong to the wise, far-seeing heads of the new generation," smiled the older man. "You arrange your desires and earn your holidays before you claim them. I never did that, I fear. I was unfortunate in not having to. Dinah, here, was telling me the other day I had handed down the same misfortune to Don, and handicapped him for use by too much leisure."

"Yes, you have," decided that young lady. "He is trying to blunder his way out of it now in spite of you, and make himself of use in the world."

"You young people make my head swim when I try to understand you. How is it with you, Miss Lottie? Now in my day the poor people were busy getting bread and butter, the rich ones were busy having a good time, and none of them bothered their heads over schemes for the improvement of the world, and theories for individual

usefulness, and all that sort of thing; the older folks and the preachers were left to wrangle over those."

"That is the reason why the new generation work themselves into fits of nervous prostration now. You never heard of that complaint in your day, either, did you? But you see they exhaust themselves to make amends for the slothfulness of their fathers—and uncles."

He only laughed at her significant addition.

"I wonder if that is what has impelled your pagan to preach on the other mountain?"

"Oh!"—and Mr. March turned with a look of innocent inquiry to Miss Dinah—"is the other one of the gentlemen within call a pagan?"

"No—I don't know; that is, I would not know what to call him. I am not posted on creeds and shades of creeds. They call him a pagan, but he is an odd one, and self-taught, they say, in both his faiths and unfaiths. I do wish, Mr. March, you had been with Don and me to-day and heard him once yourself."

"Preaching?"

"Hardly that; just talking. Afterward, one of the neighbors was commenting on it at the farm-house where I was, and airing his opinion of 'regular' preachers. The verdict of the lot seemed to be that the sort of person they want here again is the sort that can scare the unrighteous with proofs of a personal devil—a real red-fire hades, and undoubted eternal damnation. Just think of them objecting to the person they have because he does not frighten them! They have evidently had discourses on hades in the past until this one stray has been driven into heathendom by it, or into a queer mongrel creed of his own, where he seems to stand alone; and, by the way, it is the very man who acted blacksmith for you that time—the man you said had character, or something, in his face."

"I remember. So you *have* found a bit of interest up here? Tell me of him."

"I don't know enough," she answered; "and part that I do is memory of Don's. You know what he looks like; and then imagine him asserting, with the greatest reverence for Christ as a teacher, that every son of earth is also as much a son of God as that One was; that we have, through some personal original sin of our own, dropped down from our inheritance and the memory of it; that this life is a sort of school. We are transmigratory souls, punished by being driven back to earth again and again, until we school ourselves to the state of perfection required for the highest life, or, commonly speaking, heaven. Now there is the frame-work of it, I believe. But some of his remarks would send an orthodox person into spasms. The people, I think, both like him and dread him. No one doubts that he is possessed by the devil. But are not those ideas the strangest to crop out in an uneducated creature in the very midst of a community where everybody believes literally all the gospel teachings?"

"That an uneducated man should drift into those theories is strange, though the theories themselves are not so, and are certainly not new. You could pick each one of them out from different old half-forgotten religions, chiefly Oriental ones; but where did he get them? Who is he?"

"Just a mountaineer. Folks say he got his education in the timber and out of the Bible. How much would you and I know with only those chances of study? The people he lived with could not even read. His speech is crude, but it is the ideas that struck me as peculiar. I am sorry you will not get to see him—you would have him analyzed and classed in an hour; but he is going away. He prepared for a trip from the mountain just like people did for a rail-

road ride in early days—made his will, settled his estate, etc. Don is to be executor, I fancy, since he gave me the papers to bring home for him. There they are,” and she picked up the packet of papers that lay beside her riding-gloves on the table. “Not a formidable-looking lot, though there is one that has the yellow of several summers and much smoke. Oh, how careless!”

Balancing them aloft, they slipped. The cord had become loosened, and when they reached the floor it was in scattered bits.

“The Pagan may have uncanny powers, but not over a pen,” she laughed, seeing the sprawled writing that marked some of the papers; “but this, see how different it is—like a copper-plate engraving, and is on that old one, too.”

She held up for March’s notice the yellowed envelope, evidently a deed, inventory, or some such record of former legalities.

“It is beautifully done,” he agreed. “Is this his name?”

“Read it, and I’ll tell you,” she said, busily seeking among a box of scraps for some tape that would make more secure bandage for the letters.

“‘*From Jacques Lennard to*’—”

“What is that?” demanded the senior, suddenly. “Jacques Lennard! How is it spelled?”

Mr. March handed him the envelope, while Dinah turned around in frank surprise.

“Just enlighten us, won’t you?” she asked. “That last break of yours was quite theatrical. Is it a long-lost creditor?”

But the senior was plainly not in a jesting mood. He turned to Miss Lottie.

“You remember me speaking of him, surely. Jacques Lennard, a Southerner. A brilliant, ambitious fellow I

met in Mexico. There is no mistake. I'd know the writing anywhere. And to think—to think that he is exiled out here in these mountains; and yet— Look here," he added, suddenly, to Dinah, "he can't possibly be the man you call the Pagan. Why, this man seemed, to my ignorance, to have all the learning of the universe at his fingers' ends. Knew a half-dozen forgotten tongues better than I know English. His mother had been of some Asiatic race. He knew all the minerals in the earth and all the stars in the sky. *That* can't be your tinker or blacksmith."

"No, it can not." And Dinah reached for the paper. "But you did not read it all. '*From Jacques Lennard, for his son, Anton Lennard. The Mountain, 1864.*'"

"Son? I never heard of his marriage. He just dropped out of my knowledge during the war. But I would have been less surprised to hear of him turning up as a ruler over Egypt, or as a writer of some poem that would startle the world, than to hear of him located in this region; yet we used to talk of it—yes, the last time I saw him, just before the war. I had made a trip out here—my last one until now—and was telling all about this out-of-the-world corner. Well, well! and to think that he has been living in the very place that seemed to me then uninhabitable."

Dinah, glancing down the paper, noted writing in the less-practiced hand along the end of it, and handed it to him in silence.

"*Jacques Lennard died on the mountain September, 1865.*"

"This other Lennard, the one we know, is his son, then," she said. "What a son from such a father!"

"I will see him to-morrow, if I have to be carried across to the mountain on a stretcher," decided the senior. "To think I've heard that man spoken of day after day and never thought to ask if he had any name but the Pagan

—the Pagan! I don't know myself what poor Jacques was in religion. His ideas in all things were too far in advance of me for me to measure him; but we were great friends those two years in the South—and now, after more than thirty, I run across his track out here. Well, well! it only proves how small the world is, after all."

"I should say it proved more than that," ventured Mr. March, who had been listening intently. "To anyone interested in the study of transmitted traits, what a subject in this unlearned fellow groping for the knowledge through doubts, and arriving at conclusions like those you spoke of through the feelings, when the intellect was imprisoned; struggling through ignorance toward the light, and urged on by that blood or brain of scholarship inherited. Why, I tell you, the idea grows on me, takes possession of me. You will not be the only one willing to see that pagan to-morrow. Pagan! Queer paganism! That is just what is a little more curious to me than all the rest. How, without any influence of learning but what the forest gives, he should have grasped just those primitive instincts of the earliest Eastern religions. Well, I do hope, Miss Dinah, you have kept that promised note-book of the characters you met out here, and that you will give me glimpses of the pages devoted to this unconscious disciple of Budd."

Dinah looked up wonderingly from the final binding of the papers.

"Why, that is the man himself—Bud!"

"What?"

"It is a nickname, you know," she explained. "They give it to boys, sometimes—I never knew why; but he was one of the boys."

. . . . .

That night the new-comer and Miss Dinah, well con-

tented with their world, dreamed dreams and told them to each other, as a man and woman will sometimes, each so sure that the veranda had never before been visited with quite so much of bliss.

"And it is somewhere over on that shadowy peak that Don is?" he remarked, with a sort of commiseration for any man less rapturously situated than himself. "Do you suppose he is going to forsake the world entirely and locate there?"

"That's the question that troubles the senior. Don is taking to his punishment so much more kindly than he has to many a dearly bought pleasure; and then," she added, laughing, "there is such a pretty girl over the mountain."

"Really?"

"Really, she is pretty."

"Does that account for his generosity in releasing a pretty one on this side of the mountain?"

"I don't know—perhaps. No, it does not, either; he is naturally generous. In fact, Don Edson's friendship is worth more to a girl than many a man's love."

"Oh!" And the intonation spoke volumes.

"But you are not one of the many men—not yet," she laughed. "But I have grown to like him greatly of late."

"Tell me of the pretty girl," he suggested; but Dinah shook her head.

"No, I think not. Wait until you see her, and then I'll listen to your telling. It is not fair to Don for me to tattle on mere supposition. I wish you would tell me if that is a cloud away down there, or only one of the southern mountains looming up dark on the horizon."

"A cloud, surely; and the wind seems rising. Are you afraid of the storms up here?"

"No; but let us go in. I don't want our first evening



a merr-y of watching clouds, for clouds can mean a heap in this region. One cloud this summer has made me nervous every time I see one creeping over the peaks. To-night I want to look the other way—across the valley where the moonlight lies, and there is scarcely a shadow. That is better, is it not? Come, let us go in."

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A NIGHT AND A DAWNING.

Had they waited a little longer, they might have seen rising another cloud, and from the very quarter where the moon's rays had left so few shadows—a great funnel-shaped cloud that crept up black over the mists, and then the wind arose and dragged it back and forth until, over the other mountain, a solitary storm seemed raging; and every now and then there would gleam through its darkness bright flashes, as of lightning that leaped from the earth. For a forest fire had broken loose on the mountain. The origin of it is still a mystery, unless one accept the popular idea that the regions of brimstone and sulphur had somewhere an opening in that vicinity for the accommodation of Bud and Granny, and that out of it had leaped the scourge. Anyway, its wildest revels were along the ghost-walked Ledge, and from there a hurry-scurry of swift feet pattered over the dry leaves. Things winged and things four-footed were joining in a grand stampede for some unsinged harbor.

They came bounding and fluttering as if carried before some low wind that hugged the earth. The wings of some blinded, frightened thing flapped in the face of Don, who

was walking alone on one of the "flats," high up above the forge ravine.

He could not have told how long he had been there, or why he stayed; only wherever he would go out of the timber he was likely to meet people—talk to them, perhaps, and solitude seemed better. He told himself people made him tired. He had told Mr. Keesy the same thing when that person had met him on the forge road with the surprising statement that the lower regions had yielded up old Moll again (no longer poor Mollie of past recollection).

But the news cut him loose from present promises regarding the suspected man; even in the midst of the havoc which the heat was making with his head he remembered that and felt relieved.

And the sun went down, and took the heat with it—that is, took it from every other corner of the mountain except the share that persisted in throbbing through his own brain.

The stars came out, and the wind arose a trifle; and still he stayed there. Sometimes he lay prone, with the smell of the leaves in his face; sometimes he tried to review the days past and analyze their effect, not only on his own feelings, but to try and apply remembered bits to two other lives there, and account in that way for present results. Sometimes—and those times often enough to revolutionize Krin's high faith in him—sometimes he swore. The maledictions, however, were not directed to anyone outside a select order of fools—an order to which his remarks intimated that he belonged.

He was passing his time in that way, and getting some physical exercise at the same time by tramping back and forward, when that fugitive bird awakened him to the realization that things were moving in the forest. And his horse neighed to him a warning or a protest.

"There are some ideas," he remarked, in confidential

apology, as he untied the animal and led him out through the nearest cut to the road—"there are some ideas that make a fool of a man, to the extent of forgetting horse-feed. I've been one of that sort to-day, and you have not had a bite since breakfast. Hard lines on you to have such a rider. But there are some knocks, fortunately, that a man don't get every day of his life—not more than once in six months, say. So you needn't be afraid of this developing into a steady thing. I may yet reform."

The horse whinnied low at the sound of his voice, as if willing to accept the dubious promise; but his persistence in pulling back as if unwilling to follow was a thing to try his master's patience.

"He acts as he did that other night when we got lost," he thought—"that other night when—" But he stopped there. A man can't reform if he clings to old weaknesses; and at a word one had awakened the ghost that had smiled on him over the laurels that night—that had passed with him through the twilight to the road, and the chasm between them—always the charm!

All at once the wind that was now creaking through the trees brought him the strong smell of the smoke, accounting in a flash for the frightened things of the forest, and even the reluctant steps of the horse, that wanted to go the other way.

A forest fire! He had heard dire tales of their ravages, of the overpowering force of them, when let loose on the mountains; but with the leaves yet green—

Then he remembered hearing them say that the woods were dry enough for fire. The smoke was already darkening the woods, and clouds lay low on the mountain, while afar off he heard from time to time the roll of thunder that threatened a storm.

He heard something more than that—voices that came

up from the basin below. People made him tired, he said, yet he was just inconsistent enough to be rather pleased than otherwise at that sound of humanity. They might help him get his bearings, and find the nearest way out, for glimpses of the fire were coming to him now across the timbered valley. It was in the direct path by which he had reached his haven of rest, and it was moving in two directions. It looked like a traveling branch of hades, and sharp reports like explosions came from the shifting flames; yet through it all he heard those voices. Then hurrying as best he could, his arm was wrenched by the horse he was leading suddenly leaping aside with a snort of terror.

Was it a ghost he saw? Don felt himself grow cold as his eyes rested on a pale face that shone from out the shadows. The moon, whose gleams were growing more fitful, yet gave some light, and its whiteness lent an added spectral likeness to the apparition.

Was it, then, Dick's ghost that walked the Ledge? Don asked himself the question in one swift terror-touched instant; the next he had jumped forward with outstretched hand.

"You scoundrel!"

Dick's ghost tried to wriggle free, but failed. Don's fright seemed to give him added strength.

"Look here, now," objected his prisoner, "what you raisin' Cain about? You hain't any need to let on you didn't know. It was you took us the notice."

"The notice?" His fingers relaxed now that the reality of the figure was established.

"Yes, the notice down to the Ledge—the notice to tote Granny home, an' all."

"Oh!" He looked at the fugitive contemplatively. "Then it's been *you* all along! It's been you that has frightened that poor girl half to death. You, who ought

to be taking care of her instead of leaving her like this to—to the worst of troubles.”

“Pshaw! She’s all right,” said Dick, with his elegant air of unconcern. “Her an’ the young one, too. I’ve heerd of them all the time.”

“Well, you’ll do more than hear now,” said the other, grimly. “You’ll go down there to Riker’s this night and let her know you’re alive. If she’ll go with you, you can leave here and make a living for her where folks don’t know you. She sha’n’t be worried another day like this. Good God! man, you don’t know the harm you have done; but now you’ve got to look after her.”

The lips, sneering and supercilious, as of old, curled in an ugly way at the command in the tone. Dick had never been used to commands.

“’Pears to me,” he said, with watchful, insulting slowness, “that most o’ the men on this here mountain are oneasy about my woman bein’ looked after. May be, now, you’d like to take the job off my hands an’ look after her yourself.”

And then there was a quick blow, and the sneering lips were silenced. Was it forever? As Don turned the face over with no gentle hand he thought it must be so.

“You hain’t any call to worry,” said the serious tones of Bud, that startled Don as much as the ghost had done. “He took his chance o’ life in his hand when he said that; the rest is his lookout. Come, leave him. He’s got a friend hiding in the brush there; he’ll see to him. I was following them when I saw the fire; but there ain’t time to bother with them now, for the fire’s a traveling—traveling fast.”

“Well?”

That was all. He looked at the man on the ground—her husband—and at the man standing there—the one she loved, and felt no further surprise at anything said or done.

"Well, if it keeps on to the south it'll reach the forge and the cabin. That man ain't dead"—and he bent over him a moment—"so let him be if you're coming along. She'll be about wild. She's always dreadful scared o' forest fires."

Don was leading his horse past that heap on the ground.

"Who is?" he asked.

"Why, Corinny."

"It won't cross the run to Riker's." He wondered slightly at his own calmness, apathy almost. His voice sounded in his own ears many tones lower than his usual speech. After that one outburst to Dick, words grew scarce.

"She ain't at Riker's, she's up to the cabin again, her an' Granny. That's what Becky Ann told me. And the fire is like to get there. I'll take a short cut across, whilst you tie your beast somewhere in safety. I'll start a fire above their house to fight the big one with, and as soon as you can get there you'd better come. To fight a fire takes work."

The strangeness of Don's silence must have touched Bud, for he turned and looked at him questioningly.

"You've trouble at your heart to-night," he said, kindly; "an' I reckon I've helped make it, not intending. I'd never spoke if I'd thought him alive. But would you mind saying you don't bear grudge for—for anything, and will you shake hands on it?"

Don reached out his hand without a word.

"I'll remember that when I'm gone," said Bud; "and may be you will too, and be glad."

When the horse was safely hidden on the opposite side of the little brook and his owner hurried back for that short cut to the cabin, the fire had been before him. It had blocked with blazing sentinels all access from the bluff. To attempt fighting through it was impossible, to circle it seemed equally so. There was only one thing he could think of to do, and that was to fire against it. He had a

wild, hopeless sort of hope that the line of quick flame that had blown along the bluff was only a narrow one, a wedge driven by the wind into the standing timber, and that on the other side the wall the cabin still stood safe on the rocks, and that Bud had reached it in time; and then there, he and Krin—

Something from behind struck him a blow that put an end to conjecture, and with the vision of those leaping flames overpowering him he sunk into unconsciousness.

When he awoke it was with the feel of the rain in his face. That cloud Dinah had espied on the south range was not an empty one; a storm had raged under it, one of wind as well as rain, for a tree uprooted by it lay broken but a few rods from him. It had left its track on the mountain, and it had conquered its rival, the fire. He had lain there under it for hours. Its last shower had aroused him.

The dawn was breaking, softly and sleepily, and the birds, reassured, were sending up greetings to the morning star; the others were paling one by one, slipping into their sheaths; the last dash of rain had gone by on the last hour of darkness. The night was over.

He arose, yet dizzy and unsteady, and looked about. All was smoking surlily; a glowing coal could yet be seen in some shadowy place, but the flames were dead. He could get through. He could see what was on the other side. His horse was gone, though he had been careful to fasten it securely. Its absence made him remember that blow on the head—explained it. Not caring, he started over the track of the flames.

Others were evidently creeping out with the creeping dawn. He was high up on the brow of the bluff above the forge road, and sounds floated up, voices of men, but far off, from toward Riker's. Below him, along the gorge,

smoke curled up white and blue in wavering little columns; the laurel was blackened and the ferns seared, but below all the stream wound and gurgled—no fire from above could check its flow.

Something whiter than the ashes suddenly came within range of his vision down there. Was it a white paper fluttering? He told himself so, but lessened none of the fear at his heart by the telling. All the dizziness was forced back as he went down over the wall, slipping along timbers still hot, plunging into beds of coals that left his boots crisped, on down to the level where such a few hours ago poor Krin had sobbed out her unforgivable crime.

And there he saw her, just below the level where the forge stood. At the very bottom of the steep ravine she lay, with her head on Bud's shoulder—white, white—with the child stirring whimperingly between them, and raising its pink face sleepily toward those two dead ones.

The fire had not touched them; the beech that had spanned the chasm, and that now lay smoking and broken below, told the story. His neck was broken; but she—

Opinion varied on the mountain as to the cause of Krin's death. There was no mark or sign of injury. Occult causes were not wanting. Legends of the devil claiming her are yet to be heard. Her friendship for the Pagan had met its own retribution—and their entwined arms!

The man who found them was the only one who had no opinion to offer. But had Krin in her last twenty-four hours of life grasped the gift of prophecy, that she had leaped to sudden knowledge of how dependent her own existence was on the life of another? That question came to him as he looked at the peace on her lips, and lifted gently the little one from their cold embrace.

The voices were coming closer. He carried the child up over the bank, and saw in the shadow of the forge rock



the face of Granny, as she raised herself up from a sleep on the bench.

She groaned as she straightened out the lame leg, and looked glad to see him.

"Lord! I'd be glad to see Old Nick after last night," she confessed. "An' you have the young one? It squalled there for a plum hour, but I couldn't budge. Walk here? Lord-a-mighty! no. Bud, he toted me the whole cut; then he went back for Krin. Got her along all right, an' the young one, till right there afore my eyes, an' then the log went down. It had been burnin' some, I reckon. I couldn't more'n see 'em for the smoke. Then Krin, she hollered, an' that was all. I yelled an' yelled to them, but 'twa'n't any good; an' when the young one quit squallin' I must a gone asleep."

. . . . .

Among the élite of the neighborhood, opinion ran high as to the laying of heathens inside the palings of a Christian graveyard. The Pagan was utterly tabooed; and since there was no proof to be had that Krin had even been baptized, and since her conduct in going to the Pagan's house (in the dead of night, said the reporters) was known, and since—

They were laid side by side on the highest point of land on the heathen's homestead. Don heard the comments made, but heeded not at all. The authority of the heathen himself seemed to have passed into his hands. And when the worldlings from the other mountain came over to look in the dead face of the man who had awakened their late interest, they dared not even smile at the incongruous picture of Don laying the babe in Miss Lottie's arms.

"She is my ward," he said—"so the summer has done something for me; I have something to work for."

And, as usual, his friends liked him a little bit better for the quixotic whim than for a more practical investment. In fact, Dinah, with a strange look in her eyes, turned from the sleeping face of Krin and kissed him.

"It is well you got rid of me when you did, and that Ned immediately gobbled me up, or I might have been tempted to marry you, after all, Don," she said, whimsically; "not that you are any different from what you were, only—I see you different."

Among the papers that left him executor, and that left the "Lennard place" to Krin or her children, there was another, bearing the legend:

*"To Corinne when I am dead."*

Don found food for curious conjecture in those few words, and then slipped it under Krin's clasped hands.

"Are your unspoken secrets known to each other now?" he said—and looked into the inscrutable faces touched by the secret of death—"they and the mystery of life itself? Could you now, if you chose, tell me why our lives should have become entangled?—for some plan of good that is yet to be? But you leave me without a clew to its direction—only the child—the child, and a sense of having been close to natures stronger than I guessed; strong in repression of self and in purity of heart. Out of that certainty is any future thing of good to grow? Is that why I have been the one left—I and the child?"

What numberless wondering questions have been asked just so above dead faces; and for answer there is only that sense of an unseen presence that tries to soothe, and only chills, and the closed lips seem always to have back of their faint smile the message—"Wait."

. . . . .  
A plea of love and loneliness was brought forward by Grandam Le Fevre, in view of compensation for her

granddaughter; but from her landlord scant sympathy came.

"You will get just money enough to leave the State with," he answered, "and you can follow your son and my horse whenever you choose; and if ever either of you cause further annoyance here, I will have him hunted and brought back to trial."

And Granny took the money. Before the snow fell, she and Bach again disappeared. They have not returned yet, though there are many to believe that she will reappear, as before. Never a native passes her cabin, unless it is unavoidable, and then wary eyes turn to the one door, or the one window, in fearful expectation of seeing her face.

The ghosts, of course, still abide on the "ha'nted" corner of the forest; the coffins are still supposed to be carried by the coffinless ones, and lights are still seen along the swamp in the sultry weather. Never do you hear the supposition of their being will-o'-the-wisps. It is "jest ole man Le Fevre shut out o' hell for cussedness."

People are not quite sure but the range of the ghosts takes in those two graves where the laurels whisper all the year, and rear their crowns of pink in the spring-time. It is natural to think that a pagan ghost ought to walk, and that even Krin should come back with spectral protest against leaving life in such companionship; but proof absolute of their discontent, there is none. Whatever life they met beyond the death-gate, their allotted time and work on the mountain seem ended; and the prophecies of that pagan second-sight touched some truths strangely, and are still quoted as evidence of the clear sight granted to evil powers.

But there are two people, at least, on the mountain for whom the evil powers or associations have no fear—the child who toddles often with her guardian up to those

mounds that are symbols of mysteries, and is carried back on his shoulder into the old home of the Pagan, on one wall of which glows a face of a Daphne—a Daphne with the black shadows of the brittle wood back of her, and the pale pink of the blossoms that borrow color from her fair face.

It was a thing done by Dinah at the last, and hung without a word on the wall of Don's hermitage.

"You may want it for—the child," she said, when he thanked her; "and some day, when she grows old enough to leave you and the nurse, you must remember that Auntie and I stand pledged to her care. In this new life and interest that you find fascinating, you must not let her grow entirely wild, sweet though some of the untaught things may be."

. . . . .  
"Dinah," said her fiancé, turning for a last look over the valley the morning of their departure for the world of people—over the Ligonier and the guardian mountains, where nothing ever happens—"Dinah, in all this turmoil of the fire, and Don turning into a fatherly granger, I had forgotten all about that pretty girl you said he had somewhere across there. Were you afraid she would steal my affections if you brought her in sight?"

But his sweetheart had no light retort; she only clasped his hand a little closer—a little more fondly.

"You won't ever see her, Ned; and when we come out here for the summers, you must never say even a word before Don of that fancy of mine; for, after all, it was only a fancy."

THE END.



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